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WOODROFFE.

VOL. III.

WOODROFFE

BY

MRS. RANDOLPH

AUTHOR OF

"GENTIANELLA," "WILD HYACINTH," "IRIS,"
"LITTLE PANSY," "RESEDA,"

&c., &c.

"If the earth be as fair as I hear them say,
These flowers her children are
Do they her beauty keep?
They are fresh from her lap, I know;
For I caught them fast asleep
In her arms an hour ago,
With the air, which is her breath—
Her soft and delicate breath—
Over them murmuring low."
Last Days of Pompeii.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1883.

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WOODROFFE.

CHAPTER I.

Dice *will* run the contrary way,
As is well known to all who play,
And cards will conspire as in treason;
And what with keeping a hunting-box,
Following fox, Friends in flocks,
Burgundies, hocks, From London docks,
Stultz's frocks, Manton and Nock's,
Barrel and locks, Shooting blue rocks,
Pugilistical knocks, And fighting cocks,
If he found himself short in funds and stocks,
These rhymes will furnish the reason.

Miss Kilmansegg. HOOD.

Every true man's apparel fits your thief.

Measure for Measure. Act 4, Sc. 2.

AS we have already said, Basil Woodroffe had not profited by the experience which he might have gained from his early troubles,

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or from the help brought to him by his sister's marriage. His income was clear when his father died, excepting for the debts which he had contracted since he was supposed to have made a clean breast of everything, and to have been started clear by Mr. Verulam at the time of his marriage.

As we know, he did not even then disclose all his liabilities, and having not the slightest idea of denying himself the smallest pleasure or the indulgence of the most evanescent whim, he soon found himself once more in considerable difficulties. To obtain relief from these he took to playing heavily, and for a considerable time with such success as to induce him to believe that he had found the way out of all his difficulties, and to encourage him to launch forth into fresh extravagance. But, as is always the case, fortune at length turned, he began to lose heavily, and at the time of his father's death was at his wits' end where to turn for money.

His succession to the property gave him a little breathing time. Now that he was actually in possession his creditors were more willing to wait a little, though they none of them felt any great reliance on his assurances of his anxiety to pay—he had too long been known among them as a 'slippery customer.' However, they supposed he would now be able to do so, and that the remedy, if he did not, would lie in their own hands.

Basil found everything in excellent order; if only he would have lived quietly for a year or two he could have paid his debts and started quite clear, but he could not resolve to do this. He wanted a large sum of money at once for gambling debts, and sold his commission to pay them.

These discharged, he felt free, for he never seemed to think tradesmen were worthy of the smallest consideration; he called them all robbers, and elected to forget that, as he condescended to take their goods, he was equally

bound to pay for them whether he approved of the vendors or not. And, as he chose to consider everything at the Manor old-fashioned and out of repair, he at once set to work to remodel everything.

The stables were quite out of accord with all the modern received lights upon the subject, and he sent for a builder at Mapleton and gave orders for an elaborate building on the newest principles, far larger than could be required for the number of horses he could properly afford to keep.

Then he declared it was ridiculous to allow all the hot-houses to stand empty, and engaged an expensive head gardener who at once declared all the heating apparatus had been ruined by lying idle, and persuaded his master that it was far better, and 'cheaper in the end,' to put in new boilers, 'with all the latest improvements,' than to repair what existed; and, as Basil knew nothing of the matter, condescended to recommend a friend of his own to undertake the business.

Then Basil declared the furniture was perfectly disgraceful and must have come out of the ark, and gave an expensive London firm almost *carte blanche* as to the remodelling of the whole house. In fact, he really seemed as if he believed himself the happy possessor of Fortunatus' purse, instead of a country gentleman with a very moderate income, heavy debts, and his succession duty to pay.

'I really think,' said Mr. Verulam to his wife, 'that your brother must be mad. No one in his senses could go on as he is doing even if he came into the property free of debt, which, from various things I hear, is, I fancy, very far from being the case.'

'But you cleared him once.'

'Yes, eight years and a half ago. Plenty of time for a self-indulgent young man like he is to hamper himself as badly as ever, even if he told me all the truth at the time, which I have reason to believe he did not.'

Constance looked up in surprise.

'Surely you do not mean that Basil wilfully told an untruth!' she said. 'Besides, what could have been his object? He must have wished to have everything paid and be free.'

'Perhaps the less we say about his object the better,' said Mr. Verulam, who had become acquainted with many things respecting his brother-in-law of which he had been unaware at the time of his marriage, and of which he thought his wife had best be left in ignorance. 'I know for a fact that he owed about £2,000 of which he never said a syllable.'

'I can't understand it,' said Constance, wonderingly.

'Do not distress yourself about it. Advice is thrown away on Basil. I spoke to him today about his extravagance at the Manor, and he as good as told me to mind my own business. Well, if he chooses to ruin himself, it is his own affair, not mine. I shall not interfere again.'

'It is very ungrateful of him, after all you did,' said Constance. 'And do you really think that he is in difficulties now, or only that he will be?'

'I believe he is deeply in debt. I hear he only sold out to pay gambling debts which could not wait. Then there is the succession duty, and, not content with that, he is plunging into an expenditure of thousands. Well, as I said before, I wash my hands of the whole affair—my advice is not required.'

'I am sorry; it is foolish of him.'

'Very; but on that matter there is no more to be said.'

Constance tried the effect of her own remonstrances on her brother, but with no success. Basil always appeared absolutely unable to see the possibility of doing without anything on which he had once set his fancy; he argued, quite to his own satisfaction, that it was imperative that what he called 'necessary repairs' should be carried out at once, and

assured his sister that it would be the falsest possible economy to wait, as she urged him to do; things would go from bad to worse, and would cost a great deal more to set right. A stitch in time saved nine: if that principle had been acted upon, there would not have been so much left for him to do, and a great deal more to the same effect.

As she listened, Constance realised the hopelessness of arguing with anyone so resolutely bent on recognising no law but his own pleasure. Yolande had told her how it would be, but she had not understood, until she tried, that Basil was too thoroughly wrapt up in himself to be able to understand that there was anything that could possibly interfere with what he thought necessary for his pleasure or comfort. Mrs. Woodroffe's weak indulgence had borne ample fruit, and was one of the causes which were leading her step-son headlong to ruin.

Mr. Verulam had discovered, not only that

Basil had concealed above £2,000 of debt at the time when he had given him his assistance, but also the reason why he had not chosen to confess the existence of these liabilities.

He knew that he had become entangled with an actress who called herself Rosalie Delmar, a very beautiful girl who was a star of burlesque. Her real name was Ann Jenkins, and she was almost entirely uneducated, though naturally very sharp and clever. Her extreme beauty had fascinated Basil, and she had the talent, having once attracted him, to keep him in her power by the dexterous use of flattery and apparent subservience to all his wishes.

It was his objection to his establishment in St. John's Wood becoming known to any of his family that had caused Basil to conceal the debts connected with it. Mr. Verulam had learnt the reason of this concealment almost immediately after the arrangement had

been concluded, but he had chosen to hold his peace, and to give no sign of his knowledge. He took it for granted that the connection would be of short duration, and assumed that when it was at an end Basil was tolerably certain to ask for the help he was sure to need.

But to his infinite surprise the establishment in St. John's Wood still existed, and was still presided over by the same lady, known in her villa as Mrs. Basil, but on the stage of which she was still a star as Rosalie Delmar. He wondered greatly that Basil should not have wearied, for he little guessed the artful flattery with which he was kept so carefully plied that Clematis Cottage was always the pleasantest spot in the world to him, not in the least as he himself fancied from love of its occupant, but from love of himself.

At Clematis Cottage everything that he did or said was always proclaimed to be right, his comfort and his whims were minutely studied, and yet, without his being in the least aware of

it, he was made to do exactly whatever Rosalie wished, and to give her whatever she chose. She had a violent temper, but she never treated him to any exhibition of it; she acted in private as completely as in public, and reaped her reward in obtaining everything on which she set her heart.

It was not likely that so shrewd a woman as Rosalie should not be aware of Basil's embarrassments, but, finding there was always money forthcoming when she required it, she troubled herself very little about the matter. She believed him to be an infinitely richer man than he really was, and it was not till quite two years after his father's death that she began to have any suspicion that there was anything seriously wrong with him financially.

It was not that he refused her anything that she asked for, if it could be obtained without immediate payment; but he seemed unusually short of ready money, and was as irritable as was generally the case when anything inter-

fered with his comfort. She knew too from things that he let fall that he was playing heavily, and judged from the state of his temper that fortune was far from invariably favourable.

With the instinct of a rat she began to discern signs of the sinking of the ship, and proceeded quietly to lay her plans so as to prevent any chance of her being submerged with it. She had accumulated a very large amount of valuable jewellery, and, fearful that at some time Basil's effects might be seized, she commenced preparations for removing it to a place of safety.

Basil having gone down to inspect the progress of his improvements at Woodroffe, and intending to be absent for two or three days, Rosalie sent for her brother, who was never allowed to visit Clematis Cottage when there was a chance of Basil's seeing him, for the purpose of consulting him as to the best course to pursue.

This brother, Tom Jenkins, had all his life been one of those rolling stones that proverbially gather no moss. He had been an attorney's clerk, a draper's assistant in a country town, a waiter in a hotel, a cab driver, an actor in provincial and suburban theatres, and was at the present moment acting as waiter at balls and dinner-parties.

But, wherever he was, ill-luck seemed to pursue him: even if he made a little money, he was either robbed of it by some friend who contrived to borrow it, or lost it in some small speculation which promised usurious interest. Rosalie had helped him often, but Basil had from the first decreed that he was never to see or be annoyed by any of her connections; so his visits to her were always paid by stealth.

'What is it, Nan?' he asked, when they were comfortably seated. 'I know you never send for me unless you want something.'

'Well, as you know, he won't stand it. But

he's away now down at Woodroffe, and I wanted to see you to know if you've heard anything about him among the swells where you go waiting. I'm sure there's something wrong.'

'Wrong? As how?'

'Well, as to money. I'm sure it's very low water with him.'

'This house don't look much like it, nor this wine,' and he took a long draught of champagne.

She made an impatient gesture.

'That tells nothing. The house is as it has been for years, and the wine isn't paid for.'

'But does he deny you anything? What's wrong?'

'Oh, I may get anything on credit, but there's no ready money—no, not a shilling—and his temper's been that bad lately, I'm sure he's been losing at play. Have you heard anything?'

'Well, I did hear the other night as how he owed young Lord Cashington a lot.'

'Look here, Tom, I'm as sure as can be the game's all but played out here. There'll be an execution in the house some of these days, or something: lots of them have been nasty about their bills lately. Now, they mustn't take my jewels. Where can I put them?'

'Talking of jewels,' said Tom, who was somewhat induced to be discursive, and rarely stuck to a point, 'his sister's got some of the finest I ever see. You talk of his being hard up: why don't she help him?'

'She won't; he's asked her more than once, I know. She's a nasty, proud, stuck-up thing, I fancy. And her jewels are very fine?'

'Splendid; worth mints of money.'

'How I wish I could get hold of them to spite her.'

'Why, what harm did she ever do you?'

'She wouldn't help him the other day

when he asked her. Then, too, she came to see me one night in "Floating Faustine," and she said I was vulgar, and she did not understand why people admired me.'

'Who told you?'

'He did.'

'Does she know about you and him?'

'He says not. I wish I could get her jewels. As you say, they'd be a fortune, and I'd go to America, and set up as a lady. I'm tired of Clematis Cottage; besides, I'm sure the game's nearly up.'

'Would you take me with you, Nan? I'd like a fresh start, and if you would——'

'What do you mean?'

'Why, perhaps if I was to get some good out of them, I might see about the jewels.'

'But if you thought you could get them, you'd have taken them for yourself, and never said anything to me.'

'Very true, but I can't get at them without you. You find out from him where

they're kept, and all you can, and we'll see what can be done. I've been there to wait once or twice lately, and I'm to go again next week.'

'What do you want me to find out?'

'Where they're kept, whether in a safe or not, and who has the charge, whether it's her or him or the lady's-maid.'

'It would be an awful risk, though.'

'Nothing venture, nothing get. Besides, I've a plan. Can you let me have a suit of his clothes for a night?'

'Yes, but——'

'Never mind but. I know what I want with them, and if only we throw suspicion on him it'll be safe. She'll never make a fuss if she believes it's her own brother. It'll all be hushed up you'll see, and they know he's hard up, which will be all the better. Say, will you help?'

'I'll get what I can out of him. But, if you got 'em, how am I to be sure you'll go

shares with me, that you won't bolt. If you do, I'll split!'

'No, no, I'll act on the square. You can't say, Nan, as I've ever done other to you.'

'Well, no, I can't say as you have. Now, Tom, you'd better go; it's time for me to go to the theatre. Just think where my jewels and things will be safest if the smash is to come.'

When Basil again made his appearance he was in better spirits, and Rosalie began to doubt whether the crash was quite so imminent as she had anticipated. She had arranged her plan of action, and, taking advantage of the notice of a jewel robbery in the papers, began to affect great anxiety as to where she should keep hers.

'I suppose a safe is the best thing,' said Basil, lazily.

'Yes, but which? There's such lots of advertisements. Now, I've heard your sister's

got wonderful diamonds and things; what does she do?'

'I'm sure I don't know, but I'll ask if you like.'

'Do, and where's the best place to put it, upstairs, I mean, or down, and it's a big thing, I suppose it's got a big key, how one takes care of that.'

'I hope, at any rate, it isn't very expensive,' said Basil, in a grumbling tone: 'I half wish I hadn't begun making all these improvements at Woodroffe. I'm awfully short of money.'

'But you said it was better to get everything done at once.'

'Yes, I know, and was a fool for my pains.'

'Dear Basil, I'm sure you're not that, you always are so clever, you know, you're tired and that makes you see the worst of things. But it won't help matters to lose my diamonds such beauties as you've given me too.'

'I'll ask,' said Basil, lazily, and when he next went to Carlton Terrace he asked Constance all particulars. She took him into the boudoir adjoining her bed-room, unlocked the safe, which was a very large one, and showed him all its arrangements and peculiarities.

'I wonder what you are interested in it for,' she said: 'unfortunately you have no family jewels to keep safe for the future mistress of Woodroffe.'

'I should sell them if I had. I'm awfully hard up. It does seem hard that with all your money you can't help your own brother just for once.'

'There is no use in discussing it, Basil, you know I have promised.'

She quietly locked the safe, and put the large key back in the despatch-box, whence she had taken it.

'Not a very good place for such a valuable key,' he said.

'I hardly know where it would be safer.

The door of the boudoir on to the stairs is always locked when I go to dress, and my maid is constantly in the next room. I should be sorry to think I was careless, but I cannot see that I am.'

'Well, I daresay not—you know best.'

The next day Basil described the safe to Rosalie, and quite unconsciously allowed her to draw from him a minute account of where it was placed, where the key was kept, and everything concerning the arrangement of the rooms. She extracted the information very artfully, being apparently quite absorbed in the consideration of what to do with her own safe, and only anxious to hear Constance's arrangements that she might learn which of them she had better adopt. As soon as Basil was gone, she telegraphed for Tom, and repeated to him all she had heard.

Tom listened in silence, and then said he could not at the moment decide when the attempt should be made: he was going to Carlton

Terrace to wait at a grand dinner in two days' time, and would endeavour to slip upstairs unobserved and take a look at the premises, he could then make his arrangements better. Besides, he should want time to settle how best to dispose of the booty and get everything ready for their departure; he knew some fellows who could help him, but he didn't dare say much for fear of putting them on the scent; still there were one or two things he must learn before it would be safe to attempt the robbery.

A grand dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. Verulam in Carlton Terrace, with its long list of titled guests was duly chronicled in the *Morning Post.*

The next morning Mr. Verulam left London to spend two or three days at Caenthorpe to transact some necessary business with his agent. He had been complaining for some days of feeling very unwell, and thought that a few days quiet in the country would prove beneficial.

Constance at once proposed to accompany him, but he declined her offer. There was to be a great ball at the Duchess of Myrtleshire's the day after his departure, and he wished her and Yolande to appear at it, particularly desiring that she should wear her parure of diamonds and rubies.

The ball was as other balls, excepting that Lord Bracton made it the opportunity of again proposing to Yolande, which rather upset her, for she had hoped she had made her unaltered sentiments too clear for him to be able to misunderstand them, notwithstanding which he pleaded his cause long and earnestly. She begged Constance to leave early, and they reached home by half-past one.

Constance's first act on returning home was always to return her jewels to their proper place; she always felt them a great responsibility, and was glad when they were once more under lock and key. As usual, she tried the boudoir door: it was locked, and she failed

to observe that the key was not, as it should have been, on the inside.

After she was undressed, she and Yolande sat some time talking over Lord Bracton, and referring as they but seldom did to Sir Armine. Yolande assured her sister that they were both in precisely the same mind: if they could not marry each other, neither would ever marry anyone else; they always hoped 'something' would happen, and that their patience and constancy would be rewarded.

At length Yolande went upstairs, and Constance, who was very tired, fell asleep as soon as her head was on her pillow.

She never knew how long she had slept, when she awoke with a start. What could it be? She sat up in bed and listened, but all was still. She said aloud,

'Is anyone there?' for the sound had come, she fancied, from the boudoir, but there was no reply.

'A dream—how foolish of me!' she thought,

and, settling herself once more on her pillow, fell into a doze.

Yet once more she was aroused in a precisely similar manner, and now she felt sure that there was some one in the boudoir. The door between the rooms was ajar, and a large pier-glass which was directly opposite to it showed a ray of light which distinctly proved that the curtains had been opened since she left the boudoir. And as, now considerably terrified, she raised herself on her elbow to listen, she saw clearly in the glass the figure of a man. Terror paralysed her both in thought and action; she could only gaze breathlessly at the glass whence the figure had now disappeared.

After what seemed an eternity, the shadow again crossed the glass—was she dreaming, or was it Basil? If it were he, what could he be doing there at that hour? She called faintly 'Basil,' but even as she did so a sense of the impossibility of its being really her brother came over her. But her exclamation had produced

total silence—she strained her ears, but there was nothing to be heard.

Gradually her courage revived, and as it did so she sprang from her bed and slipped on her dressing-gown: just as she was doing so she felt sure she heard the door of the boudoir close gently. Impossible! had she not herself tried it as usual and found it locked.

She entered the boudoir. With the exception of the opened curtains everything appeared as usual, there was no sign of disturbance, she almost began to think she must have been dreaming—perhaps after all the curtains had been carelessly left open the night before, and the fancied reflection in the mirror had been nothing but a dream.

Ah! but the sound of the gently closing door—she tried it, it was fast locked—how foolish she had been! and, angry with herself for her unnecessary terrors, she went back to bed, and slept peacefully till she was aroused by a loud knocking at her door.

'What is it?' she exclaimed, starting up in terror.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' came her maid's voice, 'but it is past ten, and your door is locked.'

'Locked! nonsense!' and Constance sprang out of bed and strove to open it, but it was certainly locked. 'The key must be outside, Spriggins.'

'No, ma'am.'

'It is most extraordinary. Never mind, come to the boudoir door: I will open that.'

But, when she reached it, she observed, for the first time, that the key was not, as usual, on the inside. When Spriggins testified that it was not outside either, Constance became certain that what she had seen and heard had been a reality, and not a dream.

Telling Spriggins to get the bed-room door broken open, she proceeded to examine the boudoir, but nothing seemed out of place. The safe was locked, the despatch-box stood in its

accustomed place. Stay! what was that on the floor? and, stooping, she picked up an envelope directed to Basil.

Then it was her brother she had seen! She remembered now distinctly the peculiar brown and yellow checked suit that both she and Yolande had stigmatised as so hideous that he seldom wore it. What could he possibly have been doing in her room, and why in the world should he have locked her doors?

Then there suddenly flashed into her mind the recollection of how he had cross-questioned her respecting the safe, and where she kept the key. The idea was too terrible. Constance sank into a chair. What was this of which she was suspecting her own brother? Absolutely of common, vulgar robbery, and that, too, without even knowing that she had been robbed.

She felt ashamed of herself for having even momentarily indulged the thought. She fetched her keys to open the despatch-box, but on

the first touch it opened—the box had been cut above the hinges, and the key of the safe was not there!

Constance turned cold and sick, not at the loss of her jewels, of which she now felt no doubt, but at the thought that it was her brother's work. At all costs, his connection with it must be concealed from her husband; but, if she did not tell some one, she should go mad—she must confide in Yolande.

As soon as her door was opened, she sent Spriggins for her sister, telling that astonished damsel, who was burning to repeat all the speculations of the lower regions as to the disappearance of the keys, that she would ring when she wanted her.

Yolande came at once, and Constance told her all she had seen.

'It seems impossible! Perhaps, after all, the jewels are safe.'

'My dear, if they were, why was the box broken open, the key taken, and the keys of

both my doors removed? No, they are gone, but that I should not mind, excepting for Mr. Verulam's annoyance—it is the thought that it is Basil which cuts me to the heart.'

'I don't believe it was.'

'My dear child, I *saw* him. I tell you he had on that suit of brown and yellow check that we abused so.'

'Still, Conny, I don't believe it. Poor mamma always said I was hard upon Basil, but *nothing* would make me believe this. You confess you weren't sure at first whether you were asleep or awake—you saw some one in check, and jumped to the conclusion it was Basil.'

'But you forget the envelope, child.'

'No, I don't. It is strange, of course, but the strangest things can be explained very often. Have you sent for the police?'

'Yolande, I could not. You are very confident, but remember *I saw him;* and then his

asking me all those questions the other day, and the envelope! The police would find it all out.'

'But, Conny, it must be in their hands sooner or later. You don't imagine Mr. Verulam will rest contentedly under the loss of your jewels? You know very well he will not; and the more that is found out the better for Basil—of that I am quite sure.'

'But—I saw him. Think of the disgrace!'

'If it was Basil—which I am sure it wasn't—you cannot keep it secret; if it was not, the sooner the police are on the track of the real thieves the better. Dress as quickly as you can, and I will send Jenkins to Scotland Yard.'

Very unwillingly Constance consented.

'We do not absolutely know the jewels are gone. The safe is locked,' she said.

'If they are there, the police can go away again,' said Yolande. 'Conny dear, *do* be

reasonable! The sooner what must be done is done the better for everyone.'

'Well, if it must be—but, our own brother! It is too terrible,' said Constance; and Yolande, leaving her in the hands of Spriggins, at once despatched the butler to Scotland Yard.

She took the precaution to mention the name of the maker of the safe, so the officer, on his arrival, was accompanied by a man from the shop, who quickly contrived to get the safe open, and proved that the jewels were indeed gone.

Of course everyone in the house was examined, but little was discovered. Spriggins, who was inclined to be hysterical, declared she had locked the boudoir door as usual, and left the key on the inside, and all the other servants deposed that nothing unusual had occurred within their knowledge.

Constance was required to state exactly all that she had seen and heard, and trembled

and hesitated so much as almost to induce a suspicion in the officer's mind that she had had some hand in the abstraction of her own property, or at least knew more about it than she chose to say. He was of a naturally suspicious disposition, and entertained the worst opinion of everyone, more especially perhaps of the upper classes. Constance said nothing of the envelope, and, though Yolande thought it would have been wiser to do so, she did not like to take the responsibility upon her.

The only discovery made was of two silent matches, which were found on the floor of Mr. Verulam's dressing-room, which was next to the boudoir, and some marks of muddy boots on the carpet, which the housemaid declared had not been there when she closed the windows the previous evening.

In answer to inquiries, it appeared that the only person who had been in the house late was one of the waiters at the dinner two days

before, who had come to say he could not come for the dinner the next week, as he was going to see his sick mother at Newcastle. He was a most respectable man, the butler added, and seemed in a great hurry, saying he wanted to catch the night mail.

In the perturbation of her mind, Constance had never thought of telegraphing to her husband, an omission which, when he heard of it, caused the detective to compress his lips, and to suspect more than ever that there was, what he termed, 'something fishy' about the matter. Reminded of the omission, Constance sat down to write the message, but was interrupted by the entrance of the butler with a telegram.

'*From Dr. Payne, Caenthorpe, to Mrs. Verulam,*
99, *Carlton Terrace.*

'*Your husband has had a paralytic seizure, and is alarmingly ill. Come at once.*'

In less than half an hour, Constance was

on her way to Caenthorpe, somewhat reluctantly leaving Yolande with full powers to inquire into the robbery.

CHAPTER II.

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed.

Macbeth. Act 3, Sc. 2.

LEFT to herself, Yolande's first act was to send at once for Basil. She felt that, if he were told of what had occurred, and of the two suspicious circumstances which had induced Constance really to believe that he was implicated in the robbery, that he would be able at once to set her mind at rest, and prove his innocence.

But to her great dismay the answer came back that he had left town early that morning for Paris.

'If Conny heard that, she would consider it proof positive of guilt!' thought Yolande; 'however she can persuade herself to suspect Basil I don't know, but this would make her quite certain. Well, he is extravagant and selfish enough for anything, but I don't believe in his stealing diamonds! I wish he were here though. I hardly know what to say to that disagreeable detective who really almost seems as if he thought we knew something about what had become of the jewels—he looked at Conny just as if he suspected her.'

When Mr. Johnes, the detective in charge of the case, returned that afternoon, and Yolande found herself once more subjected to his cross-examination, she began to grow more and more angry, and not a little frightened.

The detective harped so persistently on Basil's sudden departure for Paris, which he knew was unexpected, as both sisters had spoken confidently of sending for him, that

in spite of herself she began to feel uneasy.

It was of no avail to tell herself, as she had told Constance, that the mere idea was preposterous: struggle against it as she would, the evidence seemed to grow stronger and stronger connecting Basil with the mystery, and at length, feeling unable to bear her own thoughts any longer alone, she wrote:

'Please come to me if you can. I am in great trouble,' and despatched one of the footmen to the Guards' Club with orders to give it if possible into Sir Armine Haverton's own hands.

Almost before she believed the man had started, Sir Armine was announced.

'Yolande dearest, what is it? What is the trouble?'

'It does not seem so bad now that I have somebody to talk to about it,' said Yolande; 'but I felt so helpless:' and she proceeded

to recite to him all the events of the morning.

It was the first time they had been alone together, excepting in the solitude of a crowd, since the night when he had first told her how he loved her in the dimly-lit boudoir overhanging the sea at Bracton, and it was all Sir Armine could do to keep his mind steadily fixed on what she had to tell him, exciting as the story was. His thoughts would wander to that night, to the sweet moment when she had confessed she loved him, to the bitter sorrow of the impossibility of their union. But he gave no sign of what was passing in his mind, listened to the end without interrupting her, and then sat reflecting on what he had heard.

'It is a thousand pities Woodroffe chose this moment for his visit to Paris,' he said, musingly: 'it greatly increases the appearances against him.'

'Armine! You surely don't believe——'

'That he stole the jewels? No, I do not, but—— I know more than you do of his life: it may be some one connected with him. I don't for one moment imply that he was cognisant of it,' he added, seeing that Yolande was about to protest.

'But who connected with him could do such a thing? What do you know about him?' she asked, wonderingly.

'Nothing you need know, dear, nothing I could tell you. Have you got the envelope your sister picked up? But of course the police have it.'

'No,' said Yolande, producing it from her pocket, 'I don't mind telling you, Armine, but Conny actually suspected Basil, and was so afraid of making the police think he did it, she hardly told them anything.'

'Do you mean she suppressed the envelope?'

'Yes—she wanted not to send for the police at all, but I made her. As if Mr. Verulam would have given up the jewels without a struggle!'

'You were quite right. Then she said nothing about fancying she had seen Woodroffe?'

'Only that when she first woke she fancied it was Basil, as the man she saw had a coat something like one she had seen him wear. But she blushed and stammered so much that, if it were not too absurd, I should really think the detective fancied she had stolen them herself.'

'You have heard nothing yet of how she found Mr. Verulam?'

'No; I thought she would have telegraphed at once.'

'Perhaps the doctor is an alarmist, and things are not so bad as he represented. Has anything been done about offering a reward?'

'Yes—the police said there must be one,

and as Conny was gone, and I did not know what to do, I sent them to the lawyers. They have fixed the reward at £10,000. You know, the jewels altogether are said to be worth £120,000.'

'I suppose they know what Mr. Verulam would approve.'

While he spoke, Sir Armine had been turning the envelope Yolande had given him over and over in his hand, and suddenly there dropped from it a paper.

Both sisters had been far too dismayed at the sight of it to think of opening it; indeed, if it *had* occurred to them, they would have had scruples as to reading one of Basil's letters. Sir Armine glanced over it and put it into his pocket.

'I think this may be useful; you will let me keep it,' he said; 'you may depend upon my not losing it.'

'Oh, yes, keep it; what is it?'

'I will try to see if something cannot be

made of it. And now, Yolande dearest, let us talk a little of ourselves. Are you still obdurate? is there no hope for me?'

She shook her head.

'Don't let us talk of it, Armine; it can do no good. You know things are as they have always been.'

'And is this to last for ever? Yolande, you say you love me, you know I adore you—are we to be for ever apart?'

'Do not speak as if it were my fault, Armine,' said Yolande, the tears rising in her large brown eyes; 'you know I love you, as well as I can tell you,—far too much to consent to weigh you down with a penniless wife.'

'I would gladly bear the weight, dear.'

'So you think. Oh! Armine, do not try me. Heaven knows I do not doubt your love—I am as sure of it as I am of my own; but I know better than you do what the trial to you would be. It is hard enough, I know, for

you to live on £400 a year and your pay, without burdening yourself with a wife.'

'It is hard upon us both,' he said. 'Oh! Yolande, when I think of you, in all your youth and beauty, throwing away all the splendid chances that are offered you for my sake, and know that, though you love me, you will not marry me, not because you fear poverty yourself, but because you dread it for me, I feel inclined to wish we had never met.'

'I do not; I value your love too much.'

'Heaven knows, so I do yours; but the longing for you is sometimes more than I can bear.'

'We are doing no good to each other by talking like this,' said Yolande, as firmly as she could, though her voice shook ominously. 'Dear Armine, thank you for coming to me in my trouble; it is a great comfort to me that, like me, you do not believe it could have been Basil; and, if you can only make anything out of that letter, it will be too delightful. I

should care to have him positively clear, far more than for the recovery of the jewels, and so, I know, would Conny.'

'So would not Mr. Verulam I suspect though,' said Sir Armine, smiling; 'and yet I don't know; it would hurt his *amour-propre* if any stigma were attached to his brother-in-law. Well, good-bye, my darling—it has been a great pleasure to have you for a little all to myself, even though the sweet cup has its bitter drop,' and almost before Yolande had guessed his intention he had taken her in his arms and kissed her passionately,—then without another word he left the room.

Yolande, relieved by his departure of the necessity for self-control, burst into an agony of tears. She had done her best to cheer him, not to allow that she felt the hardship of their lot to the full as much as he did, if not indeed more; but now that she was left alone she let her sorrow have free course.

Why should wealth be so unequally distri-

buted? a tithe of the income that Lord Bracton had only the night before laid again at her feet, would render her and Sir Armine happy for life. It seemed almost more than she could bear to go on for ever putting away from her the happiness that was within her reach, but she loved her lover far too well to allow herself to think for a moment that it could be possible to yield to his persuasions.

She was very romantic, but she was also possessed of a strong fund of common sense, and knew, what so few girls realise till too late, that the love must be almost miraculous which survives, not great trials, but small and incessant daily worries, troubles, and privations.

And she was quite aware that such must be their portion if they married. Four hundred a year, which was quite the outside calculation of Sir Armine's income, required considerable economy even for his own sole support in the Guards; how little then would it avail for the

maintenance of a wife and—possible family. Of course he must leave his regiment, and, knowing how he loved it, she felt that it would be one of the things that would cause him ultimately to repent what he had done. And she pictured to herself what life would be when that repentance had begun, as begin sooner or later she felt it must,—how he would struggle to prevent her seeing it, but would struggle in vain. She would know what he was feeling, even before he was himself aware of it, and, besides the wound to her affection, she would be the victim of self-reproach.

No—loving him as she did, there was no course open to her but to persist in her refusal. They were not engaged—he was free as air—he might marry another to-morrow without her having the right to reproach him—if it were for his happiness, she wished he would do so and forget her:—but as she thought so the mere idea gave her a pang

which passed away as she smiled at the thought of how unlikely it was that he should so console himself.

The interview had caused her to think far more of her own affairs than of the jewels, and she quite started when after dinner Mr. Johnes again asked to see her. He had very little to say, merely to announce mysteriously that he thought they had a clue, but he interpolated two or three questions about Basil, which, although very trifling, brought back all her anxiety, and caused her to go to bed thinking more of the jewels and their mysterious disappearance, than even of her own troubles. Perhaps after all Constance had been wiser than she would have been in saying so little about Basil.

Mr. Johnes seemed so suspicious of everyone that, with such evidence as the envelope, he would certainly have at once jumped to the conclusion that Basil, and Basil only, was guilty of the robbery, and while he was occupied in

proving this, would have taken no steps towards discovering the real culprit.

Yolande was young and naturally impatient, and felt inclined to consider that the police were exceedingly dilatory, and much to blame for not having yet obtained any certain information. A 'clue' of course sounded very well, and extremely mysterious, but she would have preferred being told precisely what it was, and who it was who was suspected.

She did not realise that the clue did not really exist, but was mentioned because Mr. Johnes thought it sounded better than to confess he had made no progress whatsoever. All that he had done had been to make inquiries at the lodgings of the waiter, who was the only stranger supposed to have called on the night of the robbery in Carlton Terrace, and what he heard there seemed to bear out the man's statement.

The landlady testified that he had received a

telegram, and had at once thrown his things into a bag, paid her what he owed, and started off in a hansom, saying he must hurry to catch the train at King's Cross, as his mother was dying at Newcastle.

'Had she seen the telegram?'

'No, it wasn't no business of hers, and she never thought to look.'

'Was it lying about anywhere?'

'No—now she came to think of it, he had stuffed it into his pocket.'

This was all the information Mr. Johnes had obtained, and it certainly did not constitute much of a 'clue.' All that had been really done was to publish the reward, and to warn jewellers and pawnbrokers as to the missing stones.

Mr. Johnes had a strong impression that both the ladies in Carlton Terrace knew what had become of the missing property, and had constructed a theory that Basil's journey to Paris was for the purpose of disposing of the spoil.

But he did not choose to breathe a word of this, lest some of the glory of the discovery should be shared by another.

He had telegraphed such a careful description of the jewels to Paris as must, he thought, result in the arrest of anyone offering them for sale, more especially as a gentleman was little likely to know how to dispose of such goods without exciting suspicion.

Inquiry at Basil's lodgings had elicited that he had not come in till after six, had then rung for his valet, ordered bath and breakfast, and started to catch the eight o'clock tidal train, saying he should be back in a few days.

'What clothes was he wearing when he came in?' Mr. Johnes asked eagerly, hoping to hear of the checked yellow suit.

The landlady did not know, but the maid, who was washing the steps when he returned, testified that he wore evening dress and a light grey overcoat, and so the case somewhat broke down.

And Yolande went to bed wondering what the mysterious 'clue' was, and lay awake for a long time puzzling over why Mr. Johnes would not give her the information.

CHAPTER III.

How shocking must thy summons be, O death!
To him who is at ease in his possessions;
Who, counting on long years of pleasure here,
Is quite unfurnish'd for that world to come.

The Grave. BLAIR.

Oh God! it is a fearful thing
To see the human soul take wing,
In any shape, in any mood.

Prisoner of Chillon.

CONSTANCE'S feelings during her hasty journey to Caenthorpe were of a very bewildered description. Mr. Verulam had always appeared so well and strong that she could hardly realise the fact of his being ill.

'Paralytic seizure' conveyed very little to her mind, for she had neither seen nor heard much of illness, excepting the fit of bronchitis of which her father had died. She knew Dr. Payne was a young and very nervous man, recently come to Mapleton, and thought it probable that he had been very easily alarmed. Still there must of course be something really serious the matter, and she felt very anxious to get to her journey's end.

But the thought of Basil was what occupied her even more than her husband's illness. Turn the matter over in her mind as she would, she could not persuade herself that she had been mistaken, that the man of whom she had caught a glimpse was not really her brother. How else could that peculiar coat, and still more that envelope, be accounted for?

She had said nothing of her suspicions to the police, but could she trust herself to say nothing—in answer to the strict cross-examina-

tion to which her husband was sure to subject her on a topic of such vital interest to him as the loss of the jewels of which he was so proud —that might arouse suspicion in his mind? If it were aroused, she felt sure that he would pursue the subject remorselessly; no consideration of her relationship to the culprit would induce him to show mercy.

Perhaps—she felt it was her only hope—he might be too ill quite to appreciate the loss, and by the time he was well enough to do so all clue to the perpetrator of the robbery might have been satisfactorily lost, if only she had sufficient self-command to prevent herself from betraying what she knew.

But, even while she caught at this hope, she felt dismayed at her own wickedness in positively congratulating herself that her husband was ill; and, torn by conflicting feelings, and upset by the events of the early morning, she was in a terribly nervous condition when she

reached the Caenthorpe Station—so much so, indeed, that the station-master reported to his wife that, though 'people might say as Mr. and Mrs. Verulam was a cold-mannered couple to each other, it was easy to see as she was fond of him, she was that pale and trembling she could hardly stand.'

'How is your master?' was Constance's first question to the groom who met her with the pony-carriage.

'Much better, ma'am,' was the answer—'leastways, he was when I left, but I've been here a couple of hours. Dr. Payne thought you might come by the last train,' and Constance had tried to do so, but had been five minutes too late.

The drive was not a long one, and they soon reached the house. Constance was met in the hall by Dr. Payne, with a face of portentous length.

'Pray let me go to Mr. Verulam at once,' she said, almost impatiently, as he drew her into

the library; 'unfortunately, I missed the earlier train, or I should have been here two hours ago.'

'Most unfortunate! In that time there has been a great change. My dear Mrs. Verulam, I do not wish to alarm you unnecessarily, but I feel it my duty to tell you you must prepare for the worst.'

'You don't mean to say he is—dying?' exclaimed Constance, sinking into a chair.

Even in the shock of hearing tidings so infinitely worse than she expected, she felt guiltily conscious of a certain relief. If Mr. Verulam died, Basil would be safe, she could stop all proceedings, her dear father's name need not be stained in the eyes of the world.

'I am sadly afraid so. I have telegraphed for Sir Caulfield Carluke; but——'

'But the groom said he was much better.'

'So he was, going on most satisfactorily until the telegram arrived.'

'What telegram?'

'From the lawyers respecting the jewels.'

'The lawyers! How had they anything to do with it?'

'Here is the telegram,' said Dr. Payne, producing it, and Constance read:

'*From Messrs. Downie & Verdure, Lincoln's Inn Fields, to Walter Verulam, Esq., Caenthorpe Priory.*

'*Mrs. Verulam's jewels stolen. Have offered* £10,000 *reward. Please confirm by telegram. Messenger waits.*'

'And this made him ill again?'

'He read it twice over, then he called me, and said: "Be so good as to answer this for me: all you need say is, 'Offer £20,000,' and give it to the messenger at once." I did so, but when I returned to the room after scarcely two minutes' absence I found he had had another seizure, and he has never regained consciousness.'

'Do you mean that he will not know me?'

'Certainly not at present. Of course it is impossible to say positively what will happen, but it is my painful duty to warn you that in all human probability——'

'I will go to him at once, if you please,' said Constance, rising: 'I will be there, so that if there is any return of consciousness he shall see me.'

'Are you sure you can bear it? that it will not be too much for you?'

'It is only my duty,' said Constance, simply, but she coloured as she felt that the affection which Dr. Payne took for granted, and which would have rendered her likely to break down, was totally absent.

She walked up the stairs by the doctor's side as if in a dream, and entered her husband's room, where he lay apparently without sense or motion. She seated herself by the bed, Dr. Payne stood at the foot.

'There is no change,' he said, in a low tone: 'I did not expect there would be. Sir Caulfield should be here in an hour's time. It will be a satisfaction to have him, but I fear he will be able to suggest nothing.'

'I suppose not.'

It seemed to Constance as if she had been turned to stone by the various emotions through which she had passed; and the shock of finding her husband, who had left her apparently well and strong only the day before, lying helpless at what the doctor evidently considered the point of death. Her mind seemed paralysed, she was totally incapable of thinking, and she sat where she had first placed herself, nearly as stonily rigid as Mr. Verulam himself. Dr. Payne, after watching her for some time, stole gently out of the room, and returned with wine and a sandwich, which he made her swallow. It had an immediate effect.

Besides all she had gone through, Constance

was absolutely faint for want of food, having tasted nothing since her dinner the day before; circulation seemed to be restored, she ceased to look so deadly white, and before very long she fell fast asleep in her chair.

Before two hours had elapsed Sir Caulfield arrived, but before that time she awoke, much refreshed, and able both to think and speak naturally. Sir Caulfield confirmed everything Dr. Payne had said; there was, he thought, no hope, though it was difficult to say when the end might be: there would probably be no return of consciousness.

But Constance would not leave her post: all through the long evening and short summer night she sat like a statue by the bed, till in the dawn of the morning the end came almost imperceptibly.

Dr. Payne came round to her side, and touched her shoulder.

'All is over,' he said: 'you need keep watch no longer. Will you not go to your own room?'

Constance rose mechanically, and stood looking down for a minute or two at the bed: then without a word she suffered Dr. Payne to lead her away. Even then it struck him as strange that she had not given a last kiss, he remembered that it was always said that Mrs. Verulam was a very cold woman, and, though he had always thought her quite the reverse when he had seen her with her child, he began to think public opinion must be right.

Undressed, and laid in her own bed, Constance fell almost at once into the dreamless sleep of exhaustion, and did not wake for several hours. When she did so, she found her aunt seated by her bedside.

'My poor darling!' said Miss Lucy, kissing her fondly.

Constance sat up and passed her hand across her eyes.

'Is it true, or have I been dreaming?' she asked; and then, as she became more fully

awake—'Oh! I know it is true—he is really dead.'

Miss Lucy knew, of course, that her niece's marriage had not been one of affection, but she knew very little of her domestic life, having rarely seen her excepting in society; so, from hoping that Constance had reconciled herself to what was done, and had learnt to love her husband, she had firmly persuaded herself that such was the case. So she put her arms round her and attempted consolation.

'My poor darling, it is terrible, so dreadfully sudden; but you must try to bear it,' she said. 'Remember, you have still something to live for—there is your child.'

Constance's mind was now quite clear, and she experienced a sort of amused amazement that her aunt should think it necessary to remind her of her darling boy, or to warn her that she had not yet done with life. At the same time she felt horrified with herself for

feeling this. After all, was he not her husband, the father of her darling child, the man who had always been lavish in his generosity to her? She felt that it was almost brutal of her to be unable to grieve heartily.

But through this there came the feeling of intense relief—Basil was safe; everything must rest with her, and she could stop all proceedings. She must write to Yolande—she felt writing would be safer than a telegram.

'I must get up,' she said; 'there is so much to do.'

'Lie still, dearest, and let me do everything for you; there is no reason why you should exert yourself.'

'I must write to Yolande.'

'She knows everything, dear. I telegraphed as soon as I knew. But perhaps you would like her to come down at once, and the boy.'

'I must write myself,' said Constance; 'indeed, dear Aunt Lucy, I am rested now, and

should be much better up than with nothing to do but lie here and think.'

Miss Lucy hardly liked it; she shared the idea so common to elderly ladies that sorrow is best cured by being treated as an illness, and thought it would have been better if her niece would have remained in bed and allowed herself to be fed with soups and all sorts of nourishing things. However, she saw Constance was determined, and that it was of no use to oppose her. So, with a protest against her tiring herself, and an entreaty that she would let her do everything she could for her, Miss Lucy withdrew.

Constance felt that it was a relief to be alone. She was shocked and distressed at her husband's sudden death, but she was acutely conscious that she felt none of the despairing grief that other widows would feel at such a time, and which her aunt evidently expected of her. She could not feign what she did not feel, and she shrank from the

surprise which she feared her calmness would excite.

But the first thing to do was to write to Yolande, and save Basil from any danger of detection. Her letter was not long.

'DEAREST CHILD,

'You have heard what has happened. You and Mrs. Kerfote and Walter must come down here at once. You can give all the necessary orders about mourning to-morrow, and start the day after. And, Yolande, the *first* thing you must do is to tell the detectives to stop any further search for the jewels. I think it would kill me if it were traced to Basil, and, the more I reflect upon the matter, the more certain I feel that it was he. Stop it at once; I would far, far rather bear the loss. Kiss Walter for me; has he missed me much?

'Your loving sister,

'CONSTANCE.'

This was despatched to catch the early post at Mapleton, but that afternoon, before Yolande could have received it, a telegram from her reached Miss Lucy.

'*Much shocked at your news. Hope Conny is well. Tell her that her jewels are found, and all is right.*'

Miss Lucy, who had hardly heard of the loss of the jewels,—certainly had not taken in the idea,—was much excited by this, and hurried off to Constance for an explanation.

She was considerably astonished by the extreme thankfulness with which her niece received the intelligence. It was very odd, she thought, that Constance should care so desperately about her jewels the very day that she had lost the husband to whom she owed them.

Constance guessed her thoughts, and was not surprised at them, though she was sincerely

sorry thus to shock her sensibilities. Once she thought of telling her all, but not even to Aunt Lucy could she bear to reveal the terrible suspicion which had haunted her for thirty-six mortal hours. Even now she was in the dark as to what had happened, and did not know whether Yolande might not by some means have extracted the jewels from Basil.

As to her own future life, she had not yet had time to think. She strove hard to conceal, even from herself, the feeling of relief at the thought that now she might be natural, be her own simple self; no longer obliged to be stiff, and cold, and unsympathetic to everyone.

She had yearned for friendship, but it had not been allowed her, and her lot had been harder and colder than falls to the lot of most women. Of worldly matters she had no need to think. Mr. Verulam had repeated to her over and over again the provisions of

the settlement he had made upon her. She was to have everything, both in town and country, kept up for her, and a jointure of £10,000 a year, *so long as she remained unmarried.* The idea made her start, and at once the thought of Bernard Latreille flashed into her mind.

Poor Constance felt horrified at herself. It was true that she had never loved her husband; that before her marriage she had endeavoured to tell him honestly that it was impossible she should ever do so. Still he had been most generous to her, and kind according to his lights, though he had often tried her sorely. And now she, on the very day of his death, had allowed her thoughts to wander to the man she had loved, and to whom her husband had forbidden her even to speak!

But, shocked as she felt at what she almost persuaded herself was her heartlessness, Constance could not control her thoughts. Strive

as she would to think of other things, all the old times, all the old hopes and wishes would come back to her.

Those two quiet days in the garden at Woodroffe Manor, the shooting party at Caenthorpe, the rehearsals at Ashford, would not be driven from her memory, and still more impossible to banish was the recollection of their meeting at Bracton, and that strange interview in the cave where she had learnt that her love had not been unreturned. Whether sleeping or waking, one or other of these scenes was always before her, and, the struggle to banish such thoughts proving too much for her, she at length broke down utterly, and sobbed hysterically on her aunt's shoulder.

Naturally enough, Miss Lucy did not comprehend the situation: she imagined that her niece's tears flowed for the husband she had lost in so terribly sudden a manner, and was infinitely relieved that her demeanour had become, as she considered, so much more

natural. She soothed her as best she could according to her lights, talking of little Walter, and of all that his father would have wished her to do for him.

As she talked, Constance gradually recovered herself, and felt unspeakably thankful that her aunt was so totally unconscious of the cause of her tears. They had done her infinite good, relieved the tension of her brain, and enabled her to banish unwelcome subjects from her mind, and to fix her thoughts on what must now, of course, be the one object of her life—the future of her child.

Miss Lucy, anxious to 'rouse' her, descanted at length on the responsibility that would be hers, and, though Constance could not help feeling that, according to her own views of life, her influence over him would be better than his father's would have been, she was yet considerably impressed by the importance her aunt seemed to think would be hers.

How she hoped she should be able to guide Walter aright, and not to make mistakes that might prove injurious to his welfare or happiness in the future!

While these scenes were passing at Caenthorpe, Colonel Latreille, little guessing the change that had taken place in the life of the woman whom he adored as hopelessly as ever, was living in complete solitude at Latreille Court.

He had perfectly comprehended at Bracton that Mr. Verulam objected to his talking to his wife, and he had also seen that, unreasonable as it of course was, he had been greatly offended by the fact of his happening to be her companion during the hours of her imprisonment in the cave.

It did not take him long to decide that, so far as he could help it, no annoyance should ever reach her: dearly as he loved to be in her company, to hear the sound of her voice, he would not expose her even to the

chance of discomfort owing to her husband's unreasonable jealousy.

Therefore, when the next season they met in London, he took studious care never to approach her, contenting himself with a distant bow: but, finding this was more than he could bear, he had resigned his commission, dearly as he loved his profession, and had quitted England at once.

It was an immense sacrifice, none but himself knew how great, to leave the regiment in which he had spent so many years and which he loved so dearly, aud many were the speculations among his most intimate friends as to the cause, and many the queries addressed to him. But none received an answer, his reason was not to be told:—that he would rather by far sacrifice everything he cared for or that made life dear to him, than cause a moment's pain or even discomfort to the woman he loved.

He went abroad, caring little where he

went, and roamed in an aimless manner about Europe. Then he came back for a time to Latreille Court, and entertained ideas of settling down there permanently. But he quickly found it to be impossible. In every room he saw Constance, as he had once fondly pictured that she would be, reigning as mistress; and, unable to bear the thought of what might have been, he left England once more.

This time his absence was much more protracted, yet nothing interested him: the cities of North America or the Pampas of the South, the grand rush of Niagara or the graceful falls of the Yosemite Valley, the soft beauties of the South Sea Islands or the strange life and manners of Japan, the Joss-houses of China or the Taj at Agra, all inspired the same thought. They would be delightful if seen with her, or if even he could have hoped to describe them to, and discuss them with, her.

It was on his return from this prolonged tour that Constance had seen him in Piccadilly, and that Mr. Verulam had been annoyed by her start and blush.

He had only remained in town two days on imperative business. He would not stay longer, for it was torture to him to be where she was, and to feel he might not see her; and he was far too loyal to do so. Better that he should eat his heart out, and die of the longing to press her hand once more, than that she should suffer any, even the slightest, annoyance on his account. He had not seen her that day in Piccadilly; he was looking straight before him, thinking of her, and so he missed the glimpse that would have been as a draught of water to a parched soul.

He was doing his utmost now to force himself to live at the Court. It was sheer folly, he told himself, to try to escape from his sorrow. Go where he would, he had been

unable to elude it—would it not be better to stay at home, where, at any rate, he had certain duties? He could scarcely be more unhappy himself, and might by possibility do some good to others. At any rate, he would force himself to try it for a year. If, at the end of that time, he found life at home quite unendurable, he would seek some fresh excitement—a search for the North Pole or an exploration of Central Africa, it did not much matter what.

It was just after he had arrived at this determination that his evening paper announced to him Mr. Verulam's death. It was a long paragraph, giving a sketch of what was known of the dead man's career, and incidentally mentioning the jewel robbery; but of all, excepting the one cardinal fact, Colonel Latreille was absolutely unconscious. For hours he sat immovable, his whole mind filled with but one thought: 'Constance was free!'

The whole world had taken a new aspect

to him; once more he could look forward to the future without weariness of spirit! Free! Free to marry, and make him the happiest of men, and to be made happy herself, as she had never yet been! For had she not confessed that she loved him, and would have been his had not his own idiotic folly prevented his asking her? His own darling! When could he go to her? And he was almost starting up to consult Bradshaw, when a sense of the absurdity of his own conduct overcame him. Happiness might be his, but it was not to be thought of yet. The decencies of life must be respected, however impatient hearts might be of them.

But as he went to bed that night he hummed to himself the *refrain* of the song she had sung the first night at the Manor:

> 'Then Norah, my darling, come home to my heart,
> And never, no never, till death will we part.'

CHAPTER IV.

Heaven has to all allotted, soon or late,
Some lucky revolution of their fate;
Whose motions, if we watch and guide with skill,
(For human good depends on human will),
Our fortune rolls as from a smooth descent,
And from the first impression takes the bent;
But, if unseized, she glides away like wind,
And leaves repenting folly far behind.

Absalom and Achitophel. DRYDEN.

THE letter which Sir Armine had carried away from Carlton Terrace would not, even if she had perused it, have afforded much enlightenment to Yolande. But he naturally knew considerably more of his former comrade's private history than his sisters were at all likely to do, and was at no loss to under-

stand the signature of 'Rosalie.' The letter seemed to him a valuable clue, for it contained an injunction: 'Be sure you don't forget to ask your sister all about her safe, and where she puts the key, and all about it.'

Connecting this with what Yolande had told him concerning Basil's very special inquiries respecting the safe and its key, he came to, not the absolutely correct conclusion, but something very near it. He conceived that Rosalie was the person employed by some gang of burglars to obtain information, and wondered that Basil should not have been put on his guard by the very leading questions she seemed to have insisted upon his asking, and which, by Yolande's account, he had put exactly as desired.

The letter gave the address of Clematis Cottage (indeed, besides the name printed in gold in a sort of bower, a large branch of lilac clematis straggled, Japanese fashion, half across the paper), with which he had been un-

acquainted, and when he left Carlton Terrace he sauntered into St. James' Park and sat down on a bench to ruminate on what he had heard, and to try to find some means by which he might be of use.

For a long time every plan that suggested itself to his mind appeared on mature consideration to possess some irredeemable flaw, but at length an idea struck him, which, look at it how he would, appeared to have no drawback.

Sauntering up to the Club, he looked out Clematis Cottage, Laburnum Road, and found the possessor to be chronicled as Mrs. Basil; then he betook himself to Scotland Yard, and asked to see anyone connected with the Verulam jewel robbery. Mr. Johnes happened to have just come in, not a little disgusted at the total absence of the clue, as to the existence of which he had so cheerfully pledged himself. He was naturally somewhat inclined to resent amateur interference.

'Think you have an idea that may lead to something, have you, sir?' he asked, somewhat contemptuously; 'well, of course our ears is always open, we shall be very glad to hear anything you've got to say that may throw a light on the matter.'

Sir Armine had not the least intention of giving up the letter or telling all his suspicions to anyone. In the eyes of those unacquainted with him, they would, coupled with his abrupt and most inopportune departure for Paris, most undoubtedly tend to criminate Basil. Had not even his own sister been induced to believe him guilty? What then would be the effect of such evidence on the minds of those whose *métier* it was to believe no one innocent until they were undeniably proved to be so.

So he replied:

'It is nothing I have got to tell exactly. I know no more than you do, but I suspect something.'

'Then, sir, I don't quite see what it is you want here.'

'Wasting my valuable time,' Mr. Johnes' manner left to be inferred.

'Well, there is some one I strongly suspect of having some knowledge of the matter, and I want to go to the house and conduct the inquiry my own way, but to have one of your men within call in case I discover anything.'

'Quite irregular, sir, you must put the matter into our hands unreservedly.'

'That I utterly decline to do. I have no proofs, and may be quite mistaken. No, if it is not to be done my own way, it cannot be done at all.'

'Hamateurs think themselves very clever, and that they can teach hus our hown work very hoften,' observed Mr. Johnes, somewhat insolently.

'Is Colonel Barton in?' asked Sir Armine,

quietly; 'if he is I should like to see him. I think he will understand me.'

'I don't know, sir, if he is or not,' very sulkily.

'Please to inquire, and if he is, give him this,' and Sir Armine wrote on his card.

'DEAR B.,—Give me five minutes on serious business, I won't keep you longer.'

Mr. Johnes was decidedly more civil when he returned to conduct Sir Armine to Colonel Barton's room. He was even beginning to doubt if he had shown sound discretion; of course it was not for a moment to be supposed that this young gentleman was going to find out the great Verulam jewel robbery out of hand, when he, one of the shrewdest heads in that particular line, was so completely at fault; still, if he had listened to and flattered him a bit, he might have got some hints about the family that would have been very useful.

It was still Mr. Johnes' private conviction that Mrs. Verulam had connived at the robbery, and that her brother's sudden journey to Paris was connected with it. But he knew very little of the family matters, and wished now he had been more diplomatic, and thus contrived to elicit from Sir Armine information that might have proved invaluable. £20,000 was a reward well worth the winning; but perhaps,—dearly as he would have liked to receive it and set up on his own account a private inquiry office, where he would be his own master and hampered by no rules or directions,—Mr. Johnes thought more of the triumph and *éclat* of bringing the authors of so mysterious a jewel robbery to justice, than even of the personal advantage he would reap from it.

It never for one moment struck him as possible that the prize should slip through his own fingers into those of Sir Armine, he had far too deeply rooted a professional contempt for amateur efforts, but as he saw him disap-

pear into Colonel Barton's private room, and heard the cordial greeting accorded to him, he did wish he had been a little less abrupt, and taken the chance of anything he might have happened to hear!

'Well, Haverton, old fellow, I am delighted to see you,' was Colonel Barton's salutation; 'what is it I can do for you?'

'I want to carry out a theory about the robbery of Mrs. Verulam's jewels.'

'A theory! You! The case is in Johnes' hands, you had better talk to him.'

'I have talked to him already, and he treats the idea of my interfering with sublime contempt, and says the matter must be in your hands unreservedly or not at all.'

'Ah, well, in a general way of course he is right. It would never do to encourage a lot of amateur busybodies. But, of course, you're different. You wouldn't be here if you hadn't got a good reason, I know that well enough. You see Johnes doesn't know you,

and I do. Well, now—what is it you really want.'

'Well! I *know* nothing, but I have a suspicion a very strong one—that I know some one implicated. Don't ask me how or why—that is my secret. Now what I want is to go to the house and conduct the inquiry my own way, but to have one of your men within reach—I should prefer two.'

'By Jove! It would be quite irregular!'

'That's precisely what Johnes said.'

'He couldn't well say anything else! But seriously, Haverton, have you any *reason* for wanting to undertake this, or is it only a whim?'

'I have got a very real reason for strong suspicion. No,' as he saw Colonel Barton was about to speak: 'I know what you are going to say—that I had better give you the information and that your men will work it out far better than I can. My dear fellow, I can't do it, and what's more I won't. I should feel

surer of my work if I had two of your men as a reserve. but if you won't give them to me I must just try my luck without.'

'Well, really you seem so confident, it would be a pity to miss a chance; and yet—I hardly know what to say.'

'If you won't help me, I shall go on my own responsibility.'

'I declare I'll give it a trial. I suppose Johnes had better be one of the men.'

'I should prefer anyone else, if you don't mind. He is prejudiced against the scheme, and would work *contre cœur*.'

'Well, you shall have two good men. Where are they to meet you?'

'Let them be at my lodgings at seven o'clock. Don't tell them what they're coming for—leave me to do that.'

'I'll tell them to obey all your orders, in reason. I declare, Haverton, you must have been cut out by nature for a conspirator. Well, I wish you luck and the £20,000.'

'What?' said Sir Armine, turning at the door. 'I thought it was only ten.'

'Mr. Verulam doubled it by telegram to his lawyers at one o'clock.'

'Then he cannot be so very ill, after all. Mrs. Verulam went off in the greatest hurry this morning, owing to a telegram saying he had had a paralytic seizure.'

'Well, it is as I tell you; Downie and Verdure sent a clerk down with the telegram.'

'Well, good-bye. Remember seven sharp.'

'All right.'

As he walked back to Bury Street, Sir Armine's mind was very full. He had undertaken his present enterprise for the sake of relieving Yolande and her sister from any apprehension of their brother being the culprit; but Colonel Barton's words, 'I wish you luck and the £20,000,' would ring in his ears. If he could win that, surely then there might be hope for him with Yolande. They would not be rich, of course, but with the help of that they would

be able to live. Well, he must not think of that yet, but arrange the details of his scheme as carefully as might be; if he once began to think of Yolande, and the possibility of calling her his own, farewell to any hope of his thinking to good purpose of anything else. He had his dinner at the club, and then returned to his lodgings to await the arrival of his escort.

The two men arrived very punctually, and were evidently considerably puzzled by the errand on which they had been sent. When Sir Armine began his explanations, and they found that it was the Verulam jewel case on which they were to be engaged, they looked at each other.

'Why, this is Johnes' job!' observed one. 'It seems hardly fair-like taking it out of his hands.'

His companion muttered something to the effect that 'Johnes was a conceited chap, and would be none the worse for being taken down

a peg or two, and learning that other people had eyes and ears as well as himself.'

Evidently Mr. Johnes had at some time or other wounded his *amour propre.*

They listened very attentively to all that Sir Armine proposed, every now and then offering a suggestion, which, whenever it was possible, he adopted, that they might not be disgusted by his rejection of their counsel. Among other things, they would not hear of following him to Laburnum Road in a hansom. No, they would go first, and be there before him, and if he started a quarter of an hour after them, and drove straight up to the door, it would be the best way: he might depend upon it they would be there, but, if he saw them, he was to take no notice.

Having concerted the signal by which he was to summon them if necessary, and bestowed upon each a glass of brandy and water, Sir Armine saw his two aides-de-camp start, and waited with what patience he could muster

for the quarter of an hour to pass which he was to accord them as law. It really seemed as if the clock stood still, but at length even his impatience could retard it no longer, the hand reached the appointed hour, and running downstairs, he hailed a hansom, and gave the direction to Clematis Villa.

He gave a loud peal of the bell, and, after no very long delay, it was answered by a smart-looking maid-servant.

'Mrs. Basil is out, of course,' said Sir Armine, quietly, and speaking as if his presence were quite a matter of course. 'I have something very particular to say to her, and will wait till she comes back from the theatre.'

He expected that there would be considerable hesitation before he was admitted, but, to his amazement, the maid replied,

'Mrs. Basil said you would come, sir; but she did not much think you'd be here before half-past ten or eleven. She said as she'd be home as soon as ever she could—and oh! I

was to be sure to say as you'd find the tea in the caddy.'

Sir Armine entered considerably bewildered. He was succeeding, so far, beyond his most sanguine expectations, but still this gave him a certain amount of uneasiness. It was evident some one else was expected, and there would be a decided awkwardness in meeting with him after having been so unsuspiciously admitted by the smart damsel, who, after ushering him into the drawing-room, retired into the back regions, slamming the door behind her.

Sir Armine looked round. There was nothing in the room to distingnish it from others of its class that he had seen. It was a tawdry representation of a Louis Quinze boudoir, with both the pink and the blue too deep in tint, and therefore inharmonious; the lace cheap and common, the gilding terribly overdone. Coloured prints were hung up in huge gilt frames, the looking-glasses were of all conceiv-

able shapes and sizes, the frame being evidently of even more importance than the mirror.

There were no books, excepting a few in gaudy covers, evidently laid on the tables merely for show; there was no sign of work or other feminine occupation, the writing-table was too crowded with *ormolu* knick-nacks to be available for use, and the piano was loaded with burlesque and music-hall songs of the loudest description.

It was a very hot night, and the windows into the verandah, which was raised about two steps above the lawn, were wide open. Sir Armine stepped out and reconnoitred the position. The full moon made everything as clear as day, and he perceived that there was one point of the garden which was divided only by a wall, with a balustrade covered with creepers, from Laburnum Road. If necessary, he could communicate with his reserves without opening the front door, and thus attracting the maid's attention.

Meanwhile, he felt the only thing for him to do was to survey the premises, and see if there was anything to justify his suspicions. He had on thin evening-boots, and could move very noiselessly, and he commenced a progress through the rooms. Nothing to aid him in his search was to be found in the drawing-room or dining-room, but in a small room behind the latter he started on perceiving a large safe. It evidently had not been there very long, for it stood most inconveniently in the centre of the tiny room, and not against the wall; indeed it looked as if left exactly where it had been deposited by the tradesman who had brought it.

Of course, as Sir Armine felt, this safe did not absolutely prove anything; it was still perfectly possible that—— Mrs. Basil might really have wanted the safe she had written about for herself. Still he could not prevent himself from welcoming the sight of it as if it

were really a piece of evidence. But where was the key? The letter he had in his pocket particularly enjoined Basil to discover how his sister took care of her 'big key;' if the safe were only required for its new owner's own requirements, she would very probably put the key into some such place as Mrs. Verulam used.

What had Yolande told him? Ah! he remembered now a despatch-box, and he looked carefully round for any sign of such a hiding-place. Nothing of the sort was visible in any of the rooms, but as he wandered into the dining-room for the third time his eye accidentally rested on an ornamental tea-caddy on the sideboard, and he suddenly recollected the maid's message: 'I was to be sure to tell you the tea was in the caddy.'

Could this be a notification to an accomplice? He would see, at any rate, and he opened the caddy. For a moment he was disappointed,

nothing was visible but tea; but, determined to overlook nothing, he put his hand in, and just below the surface there lay a large key. At any rate, now he could solve the mystery, and the next moment he had applied the key to the safe and opened it. There, sure enough, was a perfect blaze of jewels, and he was able at once to identify the parures of rubies and cat's eyes. They were too remarkable for him to have the slightest doubt.

Locking the safe and putting the key in his pocket, he closed the tea-caddy, stepped into the garden, and, taking care that a large lilac-bush growing close to the wall hid him from any chance of observation from the house, gave the peculiar low whistle which had been agreed upon as a signal.

One of the detectives at once appeared, and stopped in a loitering manner with his back to the wall, not appearing as if he were attempting to converse with anyone.

'Well, sir?' he said, in a very low voice.

'It is as I thought—all the jewels are here.'

'You don't say so! Well, I never!' exclaimed the man, almost startled out of his caution.

'They are all in a large safe, and I have the key in my pocket. Can you two get into the garden? I would let you in by the door, but I am afraid of the noise—it might reach the servants' ears.'

The man looked up and down the road, then turned, and glanced at the wall.

'No difficulty about getting over, and the place seems quiet enough,' he observed: 'what's your plan now, sir?'

'I was admitted in mistake for some one else who was expected about half-past ten. The maid was told to give him a message that "he would find the tea in the caddy," that was what made me look there, and there was the key. Now I mean to put it back again, for when the person who was expected comes and the maid

finds she has given the message to the wrong person, she will tell him, and he will of course look there at once.'

'It's a pity you ain't in the force yourself, sir,' said the detective, admiringly.

'I shall write on a sheet of paper, "Sorry I could wait no longer," and leave it on the table in the hall: then I shall join you in the garden —the windows are all open, and the gas is lit, we can see into all the rooms, and you can take your own time about arresting them. Will that do?'

'First-rate, sir. I must just see my mate, though, and arrange to have help at hand in case we wants it. And you'd better write that note as soon as may be, sir, when jools like this is in the case parties is likely to be a little more than punctual.'

'The lady can't be back before half-past eleven from the theatre.'

'But the gent may, sir; it's near ten o'clock

now, and what is to be done may be as well done first as last.'

'All right. I'll do it at once. You won't be long?'

'I'll be with you in five minutes, sir, and my mate in ten,' and the detective quietly sauntered away.

Sir Armine wrote as he had said on a sheet of note-paper, appending H. B., the first initials that came into his head. Then he stepped out into the garden, and took up a position well in shadow of the trees, whence he could command the windows. It was not very long before the detective was at his side.

'A first-rate spot, sir,' he whispered. 'I shall like to see Johnes' face to-morrow when he hears what we've done to-night.'

'We may have a tough fight for them yet.'

'There'll be help handy, sir. But I fancy they'll be quite unprepared. Ah!' as the second

detective appeared and took up his place also in the shadow; 'now we're ready, and we're none too soon either,' he added a moment later, as the villa bell was heard to ring.

Clematis Cottage was somewhat curiously built, and the windows of its three ground-floor rooms looked into the garden, so that from their concealment the three men could see everything that passed in either of them. The garden was excessively small, so that they could also hear almost anything that was said.

The bell was quickly answered; they heard voices in the hall, and then a man in a light overcoat and an opera hat entered the room followed by the maid.

'Who do you say has been here?'

'I'm sure, sir, I don't know. I didn't know till this minute the gentleman was gone. He came about half-past eight, and I thought in course it was the per—the gentleman Mrs. Basil expected, but that he'd come earlier than she

thought. He knew she'd be out, and said he'd wait.'

'Didn't she leave some message?'

'Yes, sir, and in course, thinking the first gentleman was the one, I gave it to him. It was only that "the tea was in the caddy," but he hasn't rang for no water nor nothing, so he can't have had none.'

'You told him that!' exclaimed the man in great excitement; and then, observing that she looked surprised, he continued, quietly: 'well, it doesn't signify. After all, as you say, he didn't have any tea or give trouble. I think I won't have any either; I'll wait till Mrs. Basil comes, it won't be very long now.'

'She said she'd be home as soon as ever she could, sir.'

'Well, then, I'll wait here,' and he threw himself into a deep arm-chair.

No sooner, however, had the sound of a closing door demonstrated that the hand-maiden had retired to her own dominions than the

stranger sprang up and went at once to the tea-caddy.

'It's lucky I put the key back,' muttered Sir Armine, as they watched it drawn out from its hiding-place.

The stranger then went into the smaller room and opened the safe, displaying to the watchful eyes outside its glistening contents, some of which he took out, examined and replaced.

'Why shouldn't we nab him now?' whispered one of the detectives.

'Wait,' replied the other: 'we'll get the whole lot together. We want this Mrs. Basil, or whoever she may be, just as much as we do him.'

They had not long to wait, though to Sir Armine's not unnatural impatience it seemed to be hours. The man they were watching had grown tired of examining the jewels, had locked the safe, and returned to the drawing-room, where he had speedily fallen asleep. A

little after half-past eleven they heard wheels, then a pull at the bell, and in a few moments Ann Jenkins made her appearance.

'By Jove!' muttered one of the detectives under his breath, 'if it ain't Rosie Delmar of the "Nudity," she as lives along of Colonel Woodroffe. Well, this *is* a rum go!'

'Tom!' exclaimed his sister, going up to the sleeping figure in the arm-chair and shaking him by the shoulder. 'Tom, wake up, I say! we've got plenty to do.'

'All right, Nan,' returned her brother, rising, shaking himself: 'here I am.'

'It's very odd,' said his sister, 'I never knew Harvey Bryant come here before: yet it must be him as left this paper in the hall—he's the only H. B. as I know. Did you see him?'

'No, he was gone when I came. Sarah took it for granted he was me, and told him the tea was in the caddy. Don't be frightened,' as she started, 'the key was there all right.'

'Then we'll have supper and send Sarah to

bed. It was a capital thought of you sending cook away for a holiday. Sarah sleeps so sound she'll never hear anything.'

'She's bringing up supper now,' said Tom, for the apparent gentleman was none other than Tom Jenkins, Ann's brother, the waiter in Carlton Terrace.

'You may go to bed, Sarah,' said her mistress, as soon as the lobster salad and other things, including a bottle of champagne, were put upon the table, 'we shan't want nothing more.'

'We'd best make haste,' said Tom, when she had departed: 'how soon can you be ready?'

'In an hour or so.'

'That means three hours good, I'll be bound. Well, while you pack your clothes, I'll see to the jewels. That box you showed me yesterday 'll do capitally.'

'Fancy Sarah never knowing you! It's wonderful what dress 'll do, Tom.'

'Well, I've done,' he said, rising and drinking off a tumbler of champagne: 'and you'd best set to work and pack. Let me bring the boxes down here and you bring the things down to them; it 'll be ever so much easier than fetching them down when they're packed and heavy. We must be at Euston at seven sharp.'

In a very short time he and his sister had brought down various boxes, and, when she had also produced a good many dresses and was beginning to pack them, he took one of the smaller trunks into the little room, opened the safe and knelt down before it.

'Now's our time, sir,' muttered one of the detectives. 'Symes,' to his comrade, 'you tackle the lady. You,' to Sir Armine, 'you come along o' me, sir. It's easy work enough, for it's quite a surprise.'

All the windows opened on to the verandah, and two steps all along it led down to the lawn. Very quietly the three men crossed the three

feet of grass and ascended the two iron steps; so quietly indeed that their intended victims were perfectly unconscious of their vicinity.

'I say, Nan,' Tom called out, 'throw us in some linen or wool or something to go between the shiners. Blowed if I know if they won't scratch one another when we're a-rolling and a-tumbling about on the high seas. Oh, lor! Shan't we both of us be ill just.'

'Don't talk of it,' shuddered Nan: 'it ain't only the sickness, but I'm so mortal afraid of the sea! If it weren't to get over there and be rich and be a lady, I'd as lieve stay at the "Nudity" all my days. You're sure we're safe to get off clear, ain't you, Tom, and that there won't be no trouble at the other end.'

'Certain sure,' responded Tom: 'we'll be tip-top swells in New York before six months is out. You see, Nan, it ain't for nothing I've

been a waiter. I knows all the 'abits of the swells, and can teach you and make you all there in no time. We'll be—— I say! who are you? Hands off!' he shrieked, in a curiously changed tone, as Sir Armine and the detective seized each a shoulder: 'I say, Nan! help! call the police!'

But Nan too was struggling in the grip of Symes.

'We arrest you,' said Sir Armine, 'for the robbery of Mrs. Verulam's jewels.'

'Mrs. Verulam? Who's she?' asked Tom.

'And what have we got to do with jewels?' screamed Nan.

'A good lot, seeing what's in that safe,' observed Symes.

'They're all stage things! I'm am actress, Rosalie Delmar of the "Nudity;" they don't belong to me! They're the manager's.'

'Oh, indeed! It's curious they should correspond to Mrs. Verulam's list. Besides, this

gent's prepared to swear to some of the things! Oh! that's it, is it?' as Tom Jenkins made a desperate effort to wrench himself free. 'We'll soon stop that little game;' and in a moment he slipped a pair of handcuffs on to the prisoner's wrists. 'Symes, you'd better give her ladyship the bracelets too. I'm afraid, ma'am, you can't finish your packing, and get to Euston for the 7.10 train for Liverpool.'

The two detectives were intensely jubilant. It was true that the capture was not in any way owing to their skill or sagacity; they had merely been the tools of Sir Armine, who would have been despised by both of them twelve hours before as 'a *h*amateur, as thought 'e knew a lot,' but they guessed pretty well that their participation was not likely to go unrewarded, besides, their professional instincts were gratified by so unmistakably neat a capture.

And also they both rejoiced at the idea of

so completely triumphing over Mr. Johnes, who was apt to give himself considerable airs, and of being able to remind him, whenever he tried at any future time to crow over them, that he 'might 'ave been in the swim 'imself, if 'e 'adn't chosen to be so precious clever, and snub a gent as knew something.'

'It ain't of no manner of use your screaming like that, my dear,' said Symes, as Ann shouted 'Police' at the top of her decidedly shrill voice. 'There's plenty of police about, no doubt, but, you see, they're on our side. I'm sure it's very good of you to care so much about the manager's property, and I've no doubt 'e'll take it very kind of you. 'E's only got to prove it's 'is, you know, and it'll be all right, and we'll beg your pardon. But now we'd better be moving.'

'Let me just speak a word to you, sir,' said Tom, cringingly, to Sir Armine. 'It would be better if you listened to me. You'll mayhap be sorry, if you don't.'

'Well, what is it?' said Sir Armine, as the detectives, at a sign from him, drew off a little.

'You'd best listen to me, sir. You'll be sorry, if you go on with this. You see, sir, my sister, she's under Colonel Woodroffe's protection, and she's only got his sister's jewels to keep for him.'

'Is that all you have to say?'

'I should think it's about enough, sir,' said Tom, evidently disconcerted at eliciting no mark of surprise.

'Well, I see nothing in it. You evidently think we know nothing. If that were the case, why should we be here? When you go on such ticklish errands as jewel robberies, you should take care, my friend, how you drop compromising letters about.'

'It—it was only an envelope!' exclaimed Tom, quite thrown off his guard.

Sir Armine looked round to be sure the detectives had heard the admission. He was

satisfied by their countenances that they had.

'So you thought,' he said, carelessly. 'As it happens, there was a very useful letter in it. You see, in your extreme cleverness in dropping that envelope, you overreached yourself. There's nothing more to be said.'

'But there is! a great deal,' cried Ann, angrily. 'There's all my private jewellery things that have been given me in that case, along with M——, with the manager's things. You're never going to take them away from me!'

'We've got to take everything now,' said Symes. 'If so be anything really his yours, and you can prove it, why, of course, yours it is. Now, we've wasted time henough;' and in a very short time the detectives, their prisoners, and the box of jewels were on their way to the police-station in a cab; Sir Armine preceding them in a hansom to see the charge entered.

His next wish was to go and tell Yolande, but that was of course impossible, as it was only two in the morning. So he went back to his own lodgings, but was far too excited to sleep, or even to think of going to bed. It was, he felt, essential that Basil should appear at once, and at eight o'clock he sallied forth to his lodgings to inquire his address. Happily he had left it, and he at once despatched a telegram:

'It is of urgent importance you should return at once, and produce evidence where you spent Tuesday night.'

CHAPTER V.

All who joy would win,
Must share it—happiness was born a twin.
Don Juan. Canto ii. St. 172.

WHEN at length a suitable hour was reached, and Sir Armine felt himself at liberty to give way to his impatience and call at Carlton Terrace, he was met by the solemn butler with a face of portentous length.

'Very shocking news, sir,' he said, not without that special unction which servants always exhibit at having dismal tidings to deliver; 'very shocking indeed.'

'About Mr. Verulam? Is he worse?'

'He died hearly this morning, sir.'

'Then he can never know that the jewels are found.'

Sir Armine felt so keenly how strong would have been Mr. Verulam's anxiety on the subject, that he could not help saying so. The butler's curiosity was evidently aroused, but he did not think it proper to manifest it on such an occasion, so he shook his head solemnly.

'It's hawful sudden, sir.'

'Awfully sudden indeed. I suppose you have hardly heard how Mrs. Verulam is? Can I see Miss Woodroffe?'

'I should hardly think so, sir,' this in a tone of reproof at the idea of such levity as a morning visit; 'but I'll see.'

'Just give her this,' and Sir Armine wrote on his card:

'Have found everything—we were right.'

Very soon the butler returned, and, with an air of disapproval, ushered him into the drawing-

room, where Yolande was alone with little Walter and Ross. The two latter were firm allies. Ross, though growing old, and generally rather inclined to stand on his dignity, allowed Walter to take whatever liberties he pleased with him, and they were at the present moment rolling over and over together in perfect amity, on the carpet at Yolande's feet; Ross emitting playful growls, followed by Walter's equally playful reproaches.

'Jenkins has told you?' said Yolande, as they shook hands.

'Yes—does he know?' indicating the boy, who had removed himself and his playfellow a little farther off on the appearance of a visitor.

'Yes, I told him. He looked very grave for a few minutes, and then said, eagerly, "Will Mamma come home to-day?" When I told him we should go to her to-morrow, or next day, he seemed quite satisfied.'

'All his love is for his mother?'

'Yes, all. I think he was always more or less afraid of his father, and yet Mr. Verulam doted upon him, only he never knew how to talk to the child. Walter dear, I think you had better go to Mrs. Kerfote now. No, leave Ross, you know she does not like him in the school-room at lesson time.'

'He is very obedient,' said Sir Armine, as the child departed without remonstrance.

'Yes, Conny has always been determined about that, and he is a very dear little fellow. Is not this terribly sudden?'

'Yes, I am afraid it will be a great shock to your sister.'

'Of course, anything so sudden must be. It really seems incredible that he only left us much as usual the day before yesterday! It was Aunt Lucy who telegraphed. I could not hear from Conny yet.'

'I am glad she has your aunt.'

'If she had not, I must have gone to her at once. And so you have found the jewels?

And poor Mr. Verulam will never know!'

'My first exclamation when I heard of his death.'

'And you have exculpated Basil? That will be an untold relief to Conny. She was so convinced it was he.'

'Well, the thief wore his clothes, and is about his height and size. I said something about the letter that was dropped, which he interpreted to mean that we knew a great deal more than was really the case, and when we got him to the police-station he made a clean breast of it.'

'And who was he?'

'The man who came that evening to say he could not wait at the dinner next week, because he was called to Newcastle to his mother who was dying. He contrived, after he left the pantry where he had seen the butler, to slip upstairs instead of leaving the house by the area, and secreted himself in Mr. Verulam's dressing-room. When all was quiet he went

through your sister's bed-room to the boudoir, and possessed himself of the key of the door, he also put the key of her door outside so that before he began operations he could lock her in. Then he went back to the dressing-room and waited.'

'Fancy his having been so close to us when we sat talking in the boudoir.'

'You seem to have tried his patience, he thought you were never going to bed.'

'Well, though I never believed for a moment it was Basil, it is a great relief to have it proved. But how did he get Basil's clothes?'

Now Sir Armine particularly wished to avoid all mention of Miss Rosalie Delmar and her connection with Basil. If ultimately it were unavoidable that Yolande should hear the whole story, he preferred that it should be from her sister rather than from himself; besides, he did not imagine Basil would at all thank him for bringing his private history to the

notice of his family; so he quietly ignored the question, and observed:

'It was lucky you sent for me when you did. The police had no clue, and to-day it would have been too late. He had his passage taken to New York, and was in process of packing the jewels.'

'It is lucky indeed.'

'I telegraphed to Basil: he must come over and prove where he spent that night.'

'But why is that necessary, if the man has confessed?'

'It never does any harm to be too safe, and he might turn round and deny his confession. I only say he might, but it is as well to be prepared for everything. And now, Yolande, I have told you everything, let us talk of ourselves. Do you know that what must have been almost Mr. Verulam's last act was to double the reward?'

'To double it? Then it would be twenty thousand!'

'Exactly.'

'But I don't see—' then, after a pause: 'Armine! you found them? Do you mean it will be yours?'

'Certainly, love, except what I give the detectives who helped me. Now, my own darling, does not even your prudence allow that this makes a difference? It is a thousand a year, Yolande—not wealth or luxury; but if you love me as I believe you do, I think you will say it is enough, that you will hesitate no longer.'

Yolande tried to speak but her revulsion of feeling had been too sudden. She had so schooled herself in the belief that she must never, for her lover's sake, allow herself to think of marriage, that the abrupt suggestion that the necessity for self-sacrifice had passed away was too much for her, and she went into violent hysterics.

Poor Sir Armine was frightened out of his wits! He knelt at her feet and implored her to be

calm, and at length breathless and tearful she sat quiet, gasping for breath but unable to speak.

'My darling,' he implored, seating himself beside her, and putting his arm round her waist; 'my own dearest one, what is it? Surely I have not distressed you?'

'No, no,' said Yolande, struggling at length to speak, 'far from it, Armine dear. It was only the relief, the joy of thinking that you needn't fancy me to be cold and calculating any longer!'

'My darling,' he said, as he took her in his arms and kissed her fervently, 'I have never thought you cold. If you had been, my own Yolande, you would not have waited for me as you have done all these years. Do you think I am blind, love—that I do not know that at any time since we were at Bracton, nearly nine years ago, you might, if you had chosen, have been its mistress? No one who knows you could think you mercenary, Yolande. I know

you have been prudent, but I know, too, that your prudence has been far more for me than for yourself.'

'Men want so much more than women,' said Yolande, nestling her head against his shoulder.

'More shame for them, then! They are strong, and should want little; all, when there is a question of there only being enough for one, should be for the one who is weak and delicate.'

The which speech shows as conclusively as well may be that Sir Armine was very seriously in love.

'How glad Conny will be!' said Yolande, when they had further considered their present happiness: 'she will be so pleased to have lost the jewels, as you found them.'

'She had better not repeat the experiment. I should not have the same luck a second time.'

'There is the gong for luncheon!' cried Yo-

lande, in astonishment. 'Armine, you came at half-past ten: it cannot be two o'clock!'

'But it is. Shall I come in to lunch or not?'

'Certainly; there is only Walter and Mrs. Kerfote. She will be so interested to hear the jewels are found. We have all felt as if we were living in the thrilling mysteries of a three-volume novel.'

'And now the hero and heroine will marry and live happy ever after. Don't say much about the jewels before the servants. It will be as well to get the thief committed first, and I am to be at the police-court at three.'

'Then come and have your luncheon first,' and she led the way to the dining-room.

Sir Armine was as much pleased with Mrs. Kerfote as were most people who came in contact with her, and he was also greatly diverted by the behaviour of Ross, who had a chair placed for him beside Walter, on which he sat with the most demure gravity.

When Walter said grace, Ross put his paws on the table, and laid his head, with his eyes closed, upon them in the most comical manner. When Walter's plate was put before him, Ross's dinner was also placed on the table, and he proceeded to eat it with the greatest composure and decorum.

'It is Mrs. Kerfote who has taught him to be so clever,' said Yolande. 'I am quite jealous sometimes, he is so fond of her. Must you go now?' as Sir Armine rose.

'Yes, I must not be late. I will look in between five and six and tell you the result. I am on guard to-morrow,' and he took his departure.

Yolande occupied a great part of the afternoon in writing to her sister. It was absolutely impossible to her to affect what she did not feel, so she neither professed any great grief herself at Mr. Verulam's death, nor wrote as if she thought Constance must of necessity be overwhelmed with sorrow.

She said something of the terrible shock of so sudden a death, hoped Constance was keeping quiet and taking care of herself, and rejoiced that Aunt Lucy was at home to be with her. And then she continued:

'And, Conny, all your fears about Basil were unnecessary. The thief was a man who had been waiter here, and who slipped upstairs after speaking to Jenkins in the pantry, and hid in the dressing-room—that accounts for the mud on the floor—and he had stolen Basil's clothes, which accounts for them and the envelope. By the way, there was a letter in it, and when I showed it to Armine (I sent for him to advise me, for Basil was gone to Paris), he read it, and found something that gave him a clue, and he went off with it at once, and has found all the jewels, and the man who stole them.

'And oh! Conny, only think what will come of your jewels! As he found them, he will get the £20,000 reward, and we can be

married. He says it will make £1,000 a year, and we have been settling everything this afternoon, and there never was anyone in the world half so happy as I am. I know you'll be twice as glad of who found them for my sake as of having got the jewels themselves. The man has confessed everything, but Armine has thought it best to telegraph to Basil to come back from Paris, and to be able to prove where he was on Tuesday night. Dear little Walter is very well indeed, and very anxious to see you. When I told him, he looked very grave for a minute or two, and then said, a light breaking all over his little face, "Will mamma come home to-day?" I suppose I shall hear from you or Aunt Lucy to-morrow what we are to do. Of course we are to come to you, not you to us.'

The relief of this letter to Constance was inexpressible. She had been so terribly sure that Basil had been tempted by his want of money to make use of his acquaintance with

the whereabouts of her jewels that the positive knowledge that he was innocent took a weight from her mind. Miss Lucy was much more satisfied with her condition when she saw her after the receipt of Yolande's letter. Constance seemed to her more natural, more able to talk quietly of things that must be done.

After all, Miss Lucy began to say to herself, though of course dear Constance was very miserable just at present, anyone must be after such a blow, and though of course she must have loved so generous a husband as Mr. Verulam very dearly, still—there had been a great discrepancy of years between them, and doubtless she would reconcile herself to her life before long. She had her dear little boy, a beautiful place, and a fine jointure, and might make herself very happy at Caenthorpe in a quiet way.

It was curious reasoning for Miss Lucy, who had at the outset been so vehemently opposed

to the marriage; but elderly people are apt to accustom themselves easily to accomplished facts, and as she had never heard a whisper of Constance being unhappy, and had seen her constantly surrounded with company and living like a social queen at Caenthorpe, she had honestly forgotten all her objections to the alliance, and had grown to consider her niece a remarkably fortunate woman.

It was only a pity that Yolande had not yet made a good use of her great opportunities; time did not stand still, and she was nearly six and twenty. Well, of course it would be delightful for Constance to have her as a constant companion during her year of utter seclusion, which could hardly have been the case had she been married.

Constance's letter to Yolande was as warm as words could be.

'Never,' she wrote, 'since I possessed them have my jewels been a source of such sincere pleasure to me as now, when their recovery

has been of service to you, my darling. I wish, for your sake, the sum were even larger; it would not injure Walter eventually, and would be better for you, for Sir Armine is right in pointing out to you that even this will not make you rich. But oh! my darling, you love one another, your attachment has borne the test of time, and love is of far more value than wealth. I cannot tell you how happy I feel that your long, weary waiting should be over. I have always said as little as possible to you about it, for I was powerless to help you, and I saw no hope; but I am sure you have always known that my heart, if not my judgment, was with you. I shall expect you and Walter and Mrs. Kerfote to-morrow; the carriage will be at the station at 5.30. I am afraid we must not ask Sir Armine to come down just at first. He will quite understand. I have not told Aunt Lucy yet. I leave that till you come.'

The night of Yolande's arrival, the two sisters

sat up very late talking. Constance was quite surprised by Yolande's sensible and moderate ideas respecting the future. She had feared that the luxury of Carlton Terrace and Caenthorpe might have rendered her extravagant in her views, but really the contrary seemed to be the case: Yolande's intentions were infinitely more modest and reasonable than would have been the case before she ever left Woodroffe Manor.

Then she had complained bitterly of economies and restrictions, but Constance was inclined to believe what the girl said herself, that it was not so much against the privations that she rebelled, as against the injustice that threw all the discomfort on those at home in order that Basil might spend and enjoy himself as he chose. And since then Yolande had seen how little happiness the possession of vast wealth had brought her sister, and felt that the love she and Sir Armine felt for each other was

worth far more than all Mr. Verulam's thousands.

The directions which Mr. Verulam had left for his funeral were curiously minute: it almost seemed as if he must have been anticipating his own premature death, which, however, there was no reason to suppose. One thing startled Constance considerably: he desired that, if he died while his son was a child, Walter was still to attend as chief mourner.

'Poor darling!' said Constance, tearfully, 'it will be such a strange sight for him. I am afraid he will be frightened. Well!' after a pause, 'one thing is clear, if he is to go I must go too.'

'Constance, my dear,' remonstrated Miss Lucy, 'you must not think of such a thing! It would be too much for you, and you would break down; besides, it is no place for a woman.'

'I quite agree with you, Aunt Lucy, as a

general rule, but then neither is it a place for a timid child. Walter will not be frightened if I am with him.'

'But, my dear, you really cannot! Let him go with Basil.'

'We do not know that Basil will be here, and, if he is, Walter knows very little of him, far too little to find him any consolation if he were frightened. I hope Walter has had as few alarming things said to him as any child in the world; I am sure Mrs. Kerfote has taken care of that. Still there is something very awful to so young a child in funeral trappings, and I will not run the slightest risk of his being terrified.'

Miss Lucy tried to argue a little more, but she found Constance was quite determined: in anything that concerned the welfare of her boy she was firm as adamant.

Basil made his appearance on the Monday, very much startled at all that had happened in his absence. He had not Sir Armine's reticence

respecting Rosalie, as to whose existence his sisters were soon enlightened. His vanity was hugely wounded at having been actually made a cat's-paw of, and led actually to furnish the information which made the robbery possible; and also at finding that, having secured such booty for herself, Rosalie was about calmly to start for America without a word of farewell to him.

He had taken his revenge by claiming all the jewels which he had given her—they were only hers, he said, while she was under his protection.

Both prisoners were fully committed for trial. He was extremely indignant at the idea of Constance having even for one moment suspected him, and, on her pleading his own clothes and the envelope, he returned that she need not have taken a cad of a waiter for him even if he were dressed in his clothes, and, as for the envelope, it might easily have been dropped when he was last in her boudoir.

Anything, in short, would have been more natural than to suspect him.

His curiosity and anxiety respecting the will were so great as horribly to disgust Yolande, and to cause Miss Lucy to suggest that, as he knew exactly what his sister's settlements were, there could not be very much to learn. He confided to Constance that he had won an extremely large sum of money at *baccarat* in Paris; 'if he had not been called away just when he was, he might have put himself quite straight.'

'Or quite as likely have lost all you had won,' said Constance; 'dear Basil do be contented to give up play,—you may win for a time, but in the end you are sure to lose more than you gain.'

'Oh, hang it all! don't begin to preach. That's what women always say, as if a man didn't know his own business fifty times better than they could!'

Basil objected very much to the idea of

his sister or nephew attending the funeral.

'It's not a thing for a woman to do,' he said; 'and as for the child it's all nonsense at his age, everyone must see that. Just take no notice and leave it alone.'

But of this Constance would not hear: she had never disobeyed a wish of her husband's during his life, excepting when he desired her to urge Lord Bracton on Yolande's acceptance, and it was not likely that she would disregard an express injunction at so solemn a time.

Argue and storm as he might and did, Basil could not shake her determination that little Walter should take the place assigned to him, and that she would accompany him. She duly carried out her intention; and when she felt how convulsively the little fellow clung to her hand at the sight of all the strange and gloomy things around him, she felt how right she had been to insist. No one else could have comforted and re-assured him as her presence did.

The great object of interest to Basil was the reading of the will, which took place immediately after their return from the funeral, in the presence of himself, Constance, Yolande, Aunt Lucy, Mr. Longden, and his son and young Mr. Spruce. Mr. Downie read it very clearly and emphatically.

Mr. Verulam appointed his wife sole guardian of his child or children: in the event of her death, Mr. Longden and Mr. Downie were named as guardians. He recapitulated certain portions of his marriage settlements which gave his wife a jointure of £10,000 a year so long as she remained unmarried; and he specified that Caenthorpe and Carlton House Terrace were to be kept up for her by the trustees. He left her absolutely a sum of £30,000, at the same time recalling to her the promise she had once given to him respecting her brother which he stated he considered to be still binding upon her. To Basil he left £10,000, and the same to Yolande, 'unless she

married the person he wished, his wife knew who it was he intended,' when the legacy was increased to £30,000.

'To him that hath to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance!' Constance half unconsciously murmured to herself, as she thought of this total unnecessary gift, intended for the benefit of Lord Bracton. Well, that would not be required, and the £10,000 would be very acceptable to Sir Armine and her sister.

The rest of the will was occupied with details of how the surplus income of the estate was to be invested, every point being entered into most minutely. In the event of his leaving no children, the whole fortune was left to young Mr. Longden, his successor in the firm, with the proviso that in that case the business should be resigned to Mr. Spruce.

At the end of the reading, Mr. Longden and the other strangers took their departure for

London, and Constance was left alone with her own family.

'Well, Conny, you are a very rich woman,' said Miss Lucy, gravely; 'I hope it will not prove too great a care for you. And you, Yolande, who are you to marry to get £30,000?'

'Some one I never shall marry, Aunt Lucy,' said the girl, flushing hotly.

'More fool you,' said Basil, bitterly. 'Of course I know it is Bracton; and what you want better, I can't think. He'd be a brother-in-law worth having. He is a gentleman, and not likely to tie sisters down not to help their brother.'

'Basil!' said Constance, with an energy that fairly astonished her audience, 'I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself! When you have only just heard of a generous legacy bequeathed to you by Mr. Verulam, for which, and for the one left to Yolande, I am more grateful to him by far than for the wealth

he has left me, it surely ill becomes you to complain of a restriction which he had a perfect right to make, and which, I am convinced, knowing your character, he made entirely for my protection. Whatever you may think, you might surely have the decency to be silent on such a topic, and at such a time.'

Before he could answer, she rose from her seat, and left the room.

'What does it all mean?' asked Aunt Lucy, bewildered.

'It means,' answered Yolande, anticipating her brother, 'that Basil, having always been brought up to think that the world was made for him, and for no one else, had comfortably intended to spend Conny's jointure for her, as he had once intended to spend her pin-money. Happily, Mr. Verulam guessed this, and, before he married her, induced her to promise that she would never give Basil money. I know he has asked her over and over again, and she has always refused on account of the pro-

mise. And now Mr. Verulam, foreseeing what was sure to occur, has made the promise binding on her after his death.'

Basil did not trust himself to speak; he left the room, slamming the door.

Constance had duly made over to Mr. Downie the envelope directed to him, which was in her husband's despatch-box, and had asked if there was anything in it which it was requisite she should see. But the envelope, when opened, proved to contain another, also sealed, on which was inscribed:

'Only to be opened in the event of Mrs. Verulam's announcement of her intention of marrying a second time. Its existence not to be mentioned to her until such an announcement shall have been made.'

So Mr. Downie merely said there was nothing respecting which he need trouble her, and she never thought of the packet again.

'Oh, Yolande dear, I am glad!' she said, when her sister rejoined her in her own room.

'With your own £10,000 and my £30,000—it is mine absolutely, you know, to do whatever I like with—you and Sir Armine will be really comfortable. If Mr. Verulam could only know how happy it has made me! If I could only thank him!'

'But, dear Conny, it is more than good of you, but indeed it is not to be thought of! You must keep your £30,000.'

'Dear child, surely I am rich enough! Rich "beyond the dreams of avarice," as the old writers used to say. You surely don't want to deprive me of the one great pleasure this money can give me!'

'No—I know it would be a pleasure to you. Oh, Conny, who could ever doubt your generosity or your affection? But—but——'

'Well, darling, but what?'

'Don't hate me,' said Yolande, desperately, and turning crimson. 'I hate to say it now—yet—but, oh, Conny, if you marry again, you lose everything. You are young, and more

beautiful than you ever were. You will be happy some day, and then—you would be glad to have something of your own.'

Coustance crimsoned too—her sister's words brought up the thought of Bernard Latreille. But he was rich, and she well knew—if he still cared for her—he would never give a thought to whether she were penniless or not.

So with a kiss and a smile she said:

'That is nonsense, dear,' and then in a brighter tone: 'I don't see how you can prevent my doing as I please with my own.'

CHAPTER VI.

They sin who tell us love can die;
Its holy flame for ever burneth;
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth:
Too oft on earth a troubled guest,
At times receiv'd, at times oppress'd,
It here is tried and purified,
In heaven it hath its perfect rest:
It soweth here with grief and care,
But the harvest-time of love is there.

Curse of Kehama. SOUTHEY.

THE weeks and months slipped away very quietly at Caenthorpe after the funeral. Sir Armine came down as often as he could get leave, and it was arranged that he and Yolande should be quietly married at Christmas.

Rosalie Delmar and her brother had been brought to trial, and Constance had been obliged to appear to identify her property, and also to testify to what she had seen and heard on the night of the robbery. The jewels were now safely consigned to the bank, with the exception of those ornaments which had been given specially to her by Mr. Verulam, and which were all carefully mentioned in a schedule attached to his will.

With these exceptions all the jewels were made heirlooms, and were, with the rest of the estate, in the hands of the trustees, though it was specially provided that Mrs. Verulam was to wear them whenever she pleased. It did not appear to Constance that it was at all likely that she should ever care sufficiently for jewels to take the trouble of asking the trustees for an order to the bank to deliver them to her.

Anyone who had only seen the Caenthorpe drawing-rooms when they were arranged by

Mr. Verulam's wish, according to the stiff dictates of Lady Selina Longden's taste, would hardly have recognised them that autumn. Constance's taste was naturally very good, while Yolande had very strong artistic instincts, and the result was an almost insensible revolution in the appearance of the rooms in which they lived.

'What in the world have you done to this room? Have you refurnished it?' asked Lady Louisa de Vere, on her second visit, about four months after Mr. Verulam's death. 'No, I see the things are all the same, but it is the difference of arrangement. It does you infinite credit, for I used to think this the stiffest room I ever saw. It was more like Selina's drawing-room in London than anything else, and that to me is always the abomination of desolation.'

Constance forbore to say that Lady Selina had been responsible for the stiffness which had been so apparent. She had quite determined

that, beyond the necessary formal civility due to anyone whom Mr. Verulam had so delighted to honour, she would henceforth see nothing of Lady Selina.

Constance was very far indeed from being touchy or easily offended, but she felt very keenly that Lady Selina had always done her best to prevent her from taking her proper place, and had frequently done all that lay in her power to make mischief between her and Mr. Verulam. And though, from not having loved her husband, Constance did not resent this with the fiery vehemence which would otherwise have been natural, she had yet felt it very keenly, and was naturally indisposed to see more of her antagonist than she could avoid.

She felt inexpressibly grateful to Mr. Verulam for having left her sole guardian of her child; she had feared that Mr. Longden would have been associated with her, and that

Lady Selina would have made this a ground of interference.

Little Walter immensely enjoyed his autumn. Hitherto, whenever they had been at Caenthorpe, the house had always been full of company, and he had seen even less of his mother and aunt than in London; so it was quite a new experience to enjoy the freedom of the country, and at the same time to have them for his playfellows.

He was a tall, strong little fellow, looking at least two years older than he really was, and, owing to the constant individual attention that had been bestowed upon him all his life, he was unusually far advanced with his lessons.

Mrs. Kerfote was an excellent teacher; the child was very fond of her, and enjoyed his lessons, so that he had learnt almost insensibly more than is often known by boys of twelve, though he still wanted two or three months of

eight. Constance was already beginning to concern herself as to what would be best for him when something beyond feminine teaching became requisite.

Though no word ever had passed between them on the subject, Yolande had a very shrewd suspicion that her sister and Colonel Latreille had at one time cared for each other, though she of course knew nothing of what had occurred between them at Bracton.

She would never have connected Colonel Latreille's abrupt departure in any way with Constance, if she had not happened to hear Mr. Verulam say something very disagreeable about him, as 'a very forward person,' to one of the guests, who was regretting that he was obliged to leave so suddenly, and she thereupon guessed that his excessive and irrational irritation at the cave adventure was consequent upon Colonel Latreille's having been the hero of it. Then he, too, must have guessed what she suspected, and he was actually jealous,

besides being cold, and hard, and overbearing.

Poor Conny! But Yolande was quite sensible enough, young as she was, to know that it was far better not to touch on the matter to her sister; the mischief was done, and could not be remedied: silence was the only comfort Conny could have.

But now—Yolande began to wonder very much how things might be. Looking back on the past, she was greatly inclined to believe that Colonel Latreille must have left the regiment of which he was so fond, and have expatriated himself all these years because he could not bear to see Constance.

And she? She had been a perfect wife to Mr. Verulam; but if, as Yolande now felt sure, she had once loved Colonel Latreille, surely she must love him still. Yolande firmly believed in the eternity of love.

'Tell me how love cometh?
'Tis here, unsought, unsent.

And tell me how love goeth?
That was not love which went,'

tolerably well expressed her idea of the divine passion.

Then now surely they might be happy. Of course not now immediately, but when a proper time had elapsed. It never occurred to Yolande to consider, what would have been first in the minds of many, that Constance by marrying again would lose the whole of her magnificent jointure: she knew her sister far too well to imagine that this fact would weigh with her for a moment.

She wondered very greatly where Colonel Latreille was. If he were wandering in the remote regions where he was when she last heard of him, he might never see a paper, never know that Conny was free. The next time Sir Armine came down, she asked him if he had heard anything of Colonel Latreille lately.

'It is odd you should ask me that to-day,'

he said. 'I thought he was in the Rocky Mountains, or the South Sea Islands, or some impossible place, but I met him yesterday in Pall Mall.'

'Has he been home long?'

'I think he said he came back the beginning of June. Why do you ask? It's very odd, he asked ever so much about you. I say, Yolande, there was never anything between you two, was there?'

'Between us! No, indeed, you dear old goose,' said Yolande, with a merry laugh. 'Armine, I do believe you were trying hard to be jealous.' Then, more gravely: 'But—I think he was very fond of Conny.'

'Of Constance!' exclaimed Sir Armine, in astonishment. 'You don't mean before she married?'

'But I do.'

'Then why in the world——'

'Didn't he say so? That is more than I can tell you. But, the more I think of it, the

more sure I am that they did care for each other.'

'Then why did she marry Verulam?'

'You know Conny would always sacrifice herself for anyone. Well, Basil had just got into some worse scrape than usual, and Mr. Verulam offered to put things straight if she would marry him, and so, to save poor papa annoyance and worry, she consented. But I can remember how I used to hear her sob at night.'

'But, you see, it's nearly nine years ago—perhaps they've forgotten all about it. He just asked after her, certainly; but most of his questions were about you.'

'I am glad of it; his heart was too full of her to speak,' said Yolande, approvingly.

'Ah, well!—perhaps. I suppose you women understand all that sort of thing best. But, I say, Yolande, do take care; match-making's awfully dangerous work.'

'I'm not going to do anything—at any rate,

not at present; but it does no harm to know what is likely to happen. I shall say after dinner to-night that you have seen him.'

'Not before me.'

'Yes, of course; and do you talk of him naturally, and say what he told you of his travels.'

'I don't half like it; I wish you'd leave me out of it.'

But Yolande would not consent, and that evening, as soon as the servants had left the room, she began.

'Conny, Armine saw an old friend of ours yesterday, of whom we have lost sight for a long time, Colonel Latreille.'

It was not possible to doubt Constance's interest; her face and neck became a vivid crimson, but she said, with very commendable composure:

'I hope he was well.'

'Quite,' said Sir Armine, feeling very awk-

ward, and looking reproachfully at Yolande; 'he—he asked after you.'

'Did he tell you where he had been last?' asked Yolande, quite satisfied with the success of her experiment, and Sir Armine, glad to get on what appeared to him safer ground, began to talk rather fast about Fiji and the Sandwich Islands. He might have discoursed on the geography of the moon, for all the attention that either of his auditors paid him.

When they were sauntering about the garden the ensuing afternoon, Yolande suddenly stopped and held up her hand.

'Hush!' she said; 'listen! She has never sung that since she came home from Ashford, never since she heard of Basil's trouble and Mr. Verulam's proposal. My own Conny! I shall see her her own blithe, bonnie self again yet.'

Sir Armine listened, and heard 'Robin Adair,' which he remembered having heard Constance sing the first night of his and

Colonel Latreille's visit to Woodroffe Manor.

Yolande's marriage took place very quietly at Caenthorpe two days before Christmas, Basil having been with infinite difficulty persuaded to come down to give her away.

He did not at all approve of the marriage, not that he had any objection to Sir Armine personally, but that he would have infinitely preferred Lord Bracton: and he never missed an opportunity of telling Constance that 'she had been an egregious fool ever to allow Haverton to hang about Yolande; if she had only kept her free from entanglement, she would, of course, have been sensible, and married Bracton.'

Constance said nothing, for she did not choose to argue; besides, it was of course impossible to prove, what she nevertheless firmly believed, that Yolande, even if she had been fancy free, would never have cared for Lord Bracton. She let Basil grumble and blame her as he chose, but always manifested interest

whenever he began to speak of his own affairs.

These, according to his own account, were in a more prosperous condition than had been the case for a long time. Not content with the money he had won in Paris, he had returned there fortified by Mr. Verulam's legacy and had come back a very large winner indeed. He had paid off all his debts, including all that was owing for the alterations at Woodroffe, and stood absolutely clear. Perhaps Conny would tell him now that play was a bad thing! He would like to know how without it he should ever have got out of the mess.

Constance might have replied that, without play he would probably never have got into it, but she well knew that argument was of no use, and so merely said she was very glad to hear that he was free—she hoped he might long remain so.

'I shall soon be a good deal better off than I am now,' returned Basil: 'I am going to be married.'

'Married! Oh! I hope she's very nice!'

'I'm sure I don't know if you'll like her or not,' returned Basil, in a tone which very much implied: 'and I'm sure I don't care;' then he continued, quickly: 'she's a Miss Schwartz, daughter of old Schwartz, the great soap-boiler, and she has £300,000.'

'A soap-boiler! Oh! Basil, not a lady!'

'She's been educated like one, and is very fair-looking. Of course I don't pretend I'm in love, or anything of that sort, but—the fact is, I engaged myself when I was in such a mess before I went to Paris, and now I can't get out of it. If I'd only known! But, there, one never does, and I was afraid to leave the field open for Foster Laycock—and so I must just make the best of it.'

'But, Basil——'

'It's no use talking, Constance, it's got to be done. You need see as little of her as you choose—perhaps I shan't see much—it all depends,' and he sauntered out of the room,

leaving Constance full of pity for the destined bride, but conscious of a certain satisfaction that, her brother's affairs being so flourishing, he was not likely to ask her for the help which she was bound by her promise to refuse.

Yolande was deeply indignant at the idea of the introduction of a soap-boiler's daughter into the family, but at the same time she was filled with compassion for the bride-elect.

'Poor thing,' she said: 'if she only knew what is before her! I only hope she is a determined person, and able to take care of herself! When is it to be, Conny?'

'Next month, I believe.'

'Basil never could be considerate of anyone even if he fancied he was in love, but when he calmly says he isn't, and that it's a matter of money—all I can say is, heaven help his wife!'

Sir Armine and Yolande spent their honeymoon in Paris, and then paid a short visit to

Caenthorpe before settling in their tiny house in Chester Place. Sir Armine had submitted it to his wife's decision whether he should or should not remain in the Guards, and she had at once decided in the affirmative. She felt that he would be very sorry to leave, and also that he would find himself very dull with nothing to do when he lost the tie of his profession.

Besides, if they had been quite free, Constance would have urged them to live with her, and, though it would have been very pleasant, Yolande was wise enough to wish to begin as she would hereafter have to live, for she knew how much she had to learn in the way of economy and housekeeping. In her terror of being extravagant, she at first ran nearly into the opposite extreme, and in after-days Sir Armine used to tease her by telling most amusing stories, which she indignantly declared were apocryphal, as to her early prodigies of economy.

They were in London just in time for Basil's marriage, and Yolande wrote to her sister, whose mourning prevented her being present at so gay a ceremony.

'It was the *richest* proceeding I ever saw. Everyone gave you the impression of money, and of nothing else. The parents Schwartz are both fat, yellow, unctuous, and h-less, and the one son resembles them closely. The bride is not bad-looking, though not pretty. If well dressed, she is the sort of woman you will never see, but, unless I am mistaken, she has a strong will, and will be able to hold her own against Basil. Old Schwartz has tied up her money tightly, which Basil resents as an "insult." The marriage was very nearly broken off. Mr. Schwartz confided to me, "'E 'oped 'is daughter and 'er 'usband would make a grand splash" (*quere* of soapsuds!) in the season." Oh, Conny, how Basil could! But I don't suppose he'll have any compunction about cutting her relatives, and he'll *try*

to make her do it too. Whether he'll succeed is, I think, uncertain.'

One afternoon, shortly after the wedding, Yolande was sitting alone about five o'clock, Sir Armine being on guard, when the servant announced, 'Colonel Latreille.'

'I saw Haverton at the Guard's Club just now,' he said, after the first greetings were over, 'and he told me I should be most likely to find you at home at this time. I did not know till to-day that you were back in London. I have only been here two days myself.'

'We have been settled about ten days. We came up for Basil's marriage. I suppose you heard of it?'

'Yes.'

Colonel Latreille said nothing about hoping the marriage was a pleasant one to Basil's family. He knew something of the Schwartzes, and was well aware it could not be so, and was always careful to avoid saying anything

that he knew would be unpleasant to answer.

'It is a long time since we met. Hardly, I think, since we were together at Bracton,' said Yolande. 'What a traveller you have been since then!'

'Yes, I have seen most parts of the world;' then somewhat abruptly, and with a decidedly heightened colour, he said, 'I hope your sister—that Mrs. Verulam is quite well?'

'Very well indeed. We were with her for a few days before we came to London. Her boy is such a darling!'

'Is it likely—do you think she will be in London at all this year?'

'I hope she will be in Carlton Terrace for a little while in about a month.'

There was a pause, and then Yolande could not resist saying,

'Forgive me if I say what you do not like, but I guess why you ask.'

He started a little, and turned to her inquiringly.

'I have long believed,' she continued, 'that you cared for Conny.'

'Cared for her! Ah, Lady Haverton, words are poor to express what I have always felt for her! From those days at Woodroffe when you were almost a child and I helped you to gather gooseberries, till I told her the truth at Bracton, and felt that afterwards there was nothing for me to do but to go abroad, lest my presence might be a source of annoyance to her.'

'You spoke to her at Bracton?'

'Yes—it was almost involuntary—do not think too harshly of me. It was that day in the cave. During her long fainting-fit I had allowed myself, when endeavouring to revive her, to use some endearing expressions, and, seeing she had heard something, I told her all.'

'And that was—?'

'That, for an absurdly sentimental fancy, I had put off speaking to her at Ashford, fully

intending to do so on the Sunday. Then I was telegraphed for, my opportunity was lost, and—in less than a week I heard of her engagement to Mr. Verulam.'

'Poor Conny! I almost wonder you did not give her up in anger.'

'I should if I could, but,' with a sad smile, 'I could not do it. And then, when with hard thoughts of her worldliness, I came to Caenthorpe for the ball, her face looked to me like that of a martyr, and I had begun to divine that there were some reasons unknown to me for what she had done, even before you innocently enlightened me.'

'I remember,' said Yolande, blushing, 'being very angry with myself afterwards for chattering so much.'

'You were but a child then, and it was easy to see you did not half understand the full meaning of your revelations. But I think her face would have told me without them.'

'And when you told her?'

'She told me honestly and frankly that, if I had spoken at Ashford, she would have accepted me, and then, though she did not say so in so many words, she let me see that Mr. Verulam disliked my talking to her. That was why I left the next day.'

'And it was why you left the regiment, which surprised everyone so much, and went abroad?'

'Yes, it was more than I could bear to see her and not speak to her.'

'And now?'

'You cannot doubt what my hope is. Unless in these years she should have changed.'

'Conny does not change easily.'

'You know something,' he said, eagerly; 'has she ever spoken to you of me?'

'Never, but when Armine came down in November and told me he had seen you, I determined to try an experiment, so I said after dinner—as if quite accidentally—that Armine had met you, and began talking of

your travels. She blushed crimson, and the next day I heard her singing "Robin Adair," your favourite song. She had never once sung it since she came back from Ashford.'

He leant forward, and taking her hand between both his, pressed it warmly.

'Thank you a thousand times for speaking so unreservedly,' he said, heartily; 'what you say gives me the more courage to wait. But oh! Lady Haverton, must it be much longer? The time seems very long.'

'Of course you could not marry yet.'

'I suppose not,' reluctantly: 'but surely I may see her?'

'I don't see any reason against that. When she comes to London I will let you know. You had better meet her here first.'

'If your summons does not come soon,' he said, with a smile: 'my impatience will be too strong for me, and I shall invade Caenthorpe. Well, good-bye, Lady Haverton. I

have paid you a visitation, but you don't know what it has been to talk of her for the first time.'

CHAPTER VII.

But here she comes!
In the calm harbour of whose gentle breast
My tempest-beaten soul may safely rest.
Oh! my heart's joy! whate'er my sorrows be,
They cease and vanish on beholding thee:
Care shuns thy walk, as at the cheerful light
The groaning ghosts and birds obscure take flight;
By this one view all my past pains are paid,
And all I have to come more easy made.

DRYDEN.

COLONEL LATREILLE'S visits to Chester Place were very frequent, and he always received unbounded sympathy from Yolande; though a sister less absolutely devoted than she was to Constance, might have found his persistence in talking of Mrs. Verulam and of

his hopes and fears more than a little wearisome. Sir Armine indeed did so, and confided to his wife that he should be thoroughly glad when the matter was settled, when Latreille would presumably become once more a rational being.

But Yolande's patience was not to be worn out by any amount of rhapsodies about Constance, whom she considered quite as perfect as Colonel Latreille did, and she sat with Ross on her knee, stroking his silky ears, and listening in a manner infinitely soothing to her companion. Certainly at that period Bernard Latreille thought Lady Haverton, though, of course, not to be compared with her sister, the second most charming woman in the world.

Constance came up to London for a fortnight towards the end of March. During the eight months that had passed since Mr. Verulam's death, her appearance had greatly changed: despite of the deep mourning and the widow's cap she looked years younger, more indeed like

the Constance Woodroffe with whom we first made acquaintance leaning on the balustrade overhanging the river at the Manor.

Coldness was of all sentiments the one most foreign to her gentle, loving nature, and the reserve and apparent haughtiness which her husband's wishes had forced her to assume, had been a very sore trial to her. The power of once more being natural, of being absolutely herself, of saying what she thought, and of showing what she liked, was to her like a release from prison, and both mind and body benefited by it immeasurably.

'Conny, how well you look! Why, you are your old self again!' Yolande could not help exclaiming, when they first met. Their previous separation had not been sufficiently long to render the change apparent.

Lady Haverton said nothing during that first evening respecting Colonel Latreille. She had mentioned him in her letters with sufficient frequency to prepare her sister for the certainty

of meeting him in Chester Place, and did not wish to seem conscious of anything between them, though she had already begged him to call about three o'clock on the ensuing day when Constance was to lunch with her. There was plenty to talk about, for Mrs. Verulam was very full of a plan for Walter's education, and anxious to hear Sir Armine's opinion of it.

In her own heart she would have preferred to have kept her boy always at home under her own eye, with a tutor, rather than expose him to what seemed to her the perils and hardships of a public school, but she could not disguise from herself that a modification of such a course had not proved successful in Basil's case; and Sir Armine, in a conversation they had had on the subject at Caenthorpe, had earnestly assured her that a public school education was absolutely necessary in the case of an only child, more especially one with such a future position as Walter would enjoy.

So, as a means of breaking the ice, and of accustoming him to the idea of leaving home, and to the companionship of other boys, she had resolved to let him go as a day-boarder to Mr. Hendrie, the rector of Caenthorpe, who took twelve pupils, and would have a vacancy after Easter. And this was to her so momentous a decision that she longed to see Sir Armine and talk it over with him, feeling sure that he would give her comfort by telling her, what she felt in her own inner consciousness, that it was the best thing for the boy.

Yolande's intention respecting Constance's first meeting with Colonel Latreille was destined to be frustrated. As she was stepping into her Victoria from a shop in Bond Street, he happened to pass, and at once came up to her. Both were extremely agitated, Constance so much so that she hardly spoke, but her blushes and her downcast eyes told him all he wished to know.

'I shall see you again presently,' he said, with a fervent pressure of the hand, and Constance drove away, not realising that she was to meet him in Chester Place, but happy and contented at feeling sure he had not forgotten her.

Yolande wondered greatly at her preoccupation, and was much puzzled what she could be thinking about, for she had sometimes to speak twice before she received an answer. Then Constance would start and colour, and declare she was quite ashamed of herself, but that Yolande must forgive her; she—she could not accustom herself yet to parting with the boy.

The sisters were alone, for Sir Armine was on guard, and, as her ear caught the sound of the door-bell, Yolande made some trifling excuse and left the room. Their first meeting, she was determined, should be in private, and when she had heard the drawing-room door shut, she carefully impressed upon the servant

that no one was to be admitted on any pretext whatsoever.

It was well she was prepared to be patient, for time sped by, and no sound summoned her downstairs again. But she took this as the best of omens—all must be going well, or he would not stay so long.

When Colonel Latreille entered, Constance had her back to the door, and was looking at a photograph of him which stood among many others on the chimney-piece. As his name was announced, she started violently, and turned towards him, with the photograph still in her hand.

'I told you we should soon meet,' he said, taking her hand.

'I did not know—you did not say you meant here,' stammered Constance; then, regarding the photograph as a screen for her nervousness, 'How very good this is!'

'I am glad you think so; but let us talk of

what is far more interesting—of yourself. I need hardly ask you if you are well.'

'Indeed I am.'

'It is more than eight years since I last saw you. You have altered very little—if at all, for the better.'

Constance did not speak. The thought of the last time she had heard his voice, of the visit to Bracton, and the expedition to the cave, was too vividly present to her; she could not command her voice.

He guessed that she was thinking of that painful, and yet, to him, partly sweet experience. She had just seated herself in a low chair, and he stood before her and spoke as quietly as he could, though an occasional tremor in his voice showed that he commanded himself with difficulty.

'The last time I heard the sound of your voice,' he said, 'was on the day of that wild expedition to the cave at Bracton, which

might have ended so disastrously: you remember?'

'Yes,' said Constance, almost inaudibly.

'I had the opportunity then,' he continued, rapidly and huskily, 'of telling you the truth—how I had, like a madman, thrown away my opportunity for an idea, a mere sentimental whim. And you—you told me that if—if I had asked in time, you would have been mine. Constance, will you say so now? will you forgive my weak folly, for which I have been so bitterly punished, and give me the happiness for which I have never ceased to long?'

There was a pause. It would be incorrect to say that Constance had not expected that, now that she was free, Bernard Latreille would propose to her, but she had not expected his declaration so soon, and was indeed unprepared for his immediate appearance upon the scene. She covered her face with her hands and sat silent.

'Have I startled you?' he said, very softly,

kneeling down before her and gently disengaging her hands, which he held pressed in his. 'If you knew how long and weary the time has seemed to me since I knew that you were free! How I have longed to rush down to Caenthorpe, if it were only to see you, without even breathing a word of all I wished to say! Constance, you *knew* I should say it—is it not so?'

She bowed her head, but did not speak.

'Then, darling, I have not surely startled you too much. Let me hear you say you will be to me all I have so long dreamt of. Speak, dearest,' for she still remained silent.

'I will,' whispered Constance, and the next moment she was in his arms, pressed to his heart with the fondest endearments.

'How surprised Yolande will be!' said Constance, when at length, after a considerable period, there was a pause.

'Hardly,' said Colonel Latreille, smiling; 'she had a very shrewd suspicion of the state

of the case even before I made her my confidant. She has been an angel of goodness in letting me come here and talk about you and my hopes by the hour together. If it had not been for her, I could hardly have waited with the patience I have. And now, Constance, that we fully understand one another, surely there need be no delay? Can we not be married quietly at once?'

'No,' said Constance, colouring deeply; 'no, Bernard—sorry as I am to refuse the first thing you ask of me, indeed it cannot be. Mr. Verulam always behaved generously, and, according to his views, kindly, to me, and even if I could myself bear to show disrespect to his memory by a hasty marriage, which indeed I could not, I would not for worlds do anything that my boy, when he is old enough to understand, might think a slight to his father.'

'But, Constance, you have been a widow for eight months already. In the name of all that's

absurd, how much longer do you think it requisite to wait?'

'Sixteen months more would just make two years.'

'Sixteen eternities! Constance darling, you cannot mean anything so cruel? Think of all the years that I have hungered for even a sight of your face, and be merciful.'

'I feel as if I had almost done wrong in listening to you so soon, while I wear these,' she said, touching her weeds, and speaking with a trembling voice. 'Don't press me to do what I think wrong, Bernard dear.' And Colonel Latreille promised that all should be as she wished, reserving to himself the right of using further arguments when she was more accustomed to the idea; he was perfectly determined that nothing should induce him to wait for sixteen mortal months for his happiness.

'Do you know,' Constance said to him at

length: 'I ought to have told you before. If I marry again, I lose my jointure.'

'Do you suppose I care about that?'

'No, I never once thought you would—still it is right you should know.'

'To tell you the truth, dear, I am very glad that you do lose it. I have nothing like Mr. Verulam's wealth, of course, still I am very well off, and I should hate the idea of all this money coming to you. It will be all the better for your boy.'

'Dear little fellow!' said Constance, fondly: 'oh, Bernard, how thankful I shall be to have your help and advice in training him. I have tried to do everything for the best, but I have been torn in two between the dread of his learning what is bad from other boys at school, and of his growing selfish like Basil from home indulgence. But you will know what is best to do, and will decide for me.'

'In his position, a public school is an absolute necessity.'

'Ah!' with a sigh, 'that is what Sir Armine says. He has been very kind, and not teased me about it, but he is quite firm in the matter. I am thinking of sending him as a day-boarder to Mr. Hendrie at Caenthorpe: he only takes twelve boys.'

'Let him go as a weekly-boarder, and only see him on Saturday afternoon and Sunday; it would be better for you both. There! don't think me a barbarian,' as her face lengthened in dismay: 'but indeed it would be best.'

'Do you really think so?' in a very doleful tone: 'indeed I have been so careful not to spoil him, and he is very good and obedient. Bernard, I hope,' this rather timidly, 'that you will be fond of him.'

'My darling, he is yours—is not that enough for me?'

But even as he said it Colonel Latreille felt a guilty consciousness that he was distinctly jealous of little Walter, of anything indeed that

she loved so devotedly. But he had the grace to be ashamed of the feeling, and to resolve that he would die rather than that Constance should for a moment suspect it.

He could not help feeling somewhat aggrieved at her wish to postpone their marriage. Surely he had waited for his happiness for a cruelly long time. For he quite forgot to take into account that it was, after all, his own fancifulness that had stood between him and Constance nine years and a half before, and that, if he had spoken when he might, he would have saved both her and himself those weary and sorrowful years.

But the thought of this was not pleasant, and, like the majority of his sex, Colonel Latreille seldom cared to remember that anything that was disagreeable had been caused by his fault or folly. True, he had confessed that such was the case to Constance and also to Yolande, but in the former instance it was when he had been too agitated to think at all of his own

dignity, and in the latter it was when he was so low and unhappy at not seeing Constance that he was equal to any amount of self-abasement.

Now he turned his thoughts to the means by which she was to be persuaded to shorten the, as it seemed to him, utterly preposterous time of her mourning for a husband whom she had never loved. That he should succeed he did not for a moment allow himself to doubt, but he felt he must use some self-control, and not press her at once; and this, in his voluntary oblivion that the situation was in effect the outcome of his own action years ago, made him feel as if hardly used. He did not for a moment blame Constance—only he resolved that her will must give way to his.

It was almost tea-time when Yolande made her appearance in the drawing-room. She would willingly have left them to prolong their *tête-à-tête* indefinitely, but she did not like to excite the astonishment of the household by

countermanding tea, and thought that her interruption would be less unwelcome than that of the butler. They were on the sofa, his arm round her waist.

'Oh, Yolande dear! how long you have been!' cried Constance, starting up and blushing crimson.

'Don't pretend you missed me, Conny,' said her sister, laughing; 'you have been a great deal too well employed.'

'Then—you guessed?'

'Guessed! My dear, I *knew*. Colonel Latreille made me his confidant, and I was in your confidence long before.'

'In mine! Yolande, what do you mean?'

'That I always suspected something of the true state of the case, and that when you coloured so in November when I told you Armine had met him in London, and then when the next day I heard you sing "Robin Adair" again, I knew how it still was with you.'

Constance's answer was prevented by the arrival of tea, and immediately after Yolande said to Colonel Latreille:

'I daresay you will think me very barbarous and hate me accordingly, but I am going to send you away now. Conny looks quite pale and she must rest. Come back to dinner at eight; you will find her here.'

Colonel Latreille took leave with reluctance, but Yolande was firm, she really thought her sister was exhausted, besides she wanted her for a little to herself. She made her lie down on the sofa, sent away the tea-things, shaded the lamp from her eyes, and then established herself on a low stool beside her.

'Well, Conny darling, all is right between you.'

'Yes; oh, Yolande, I am so happy!' then in a low voice: 'I wish I could be sure it wasn't wrong.'

'Wrong? how do you mean?—to be happy?'

'Yes—you see it is only eight months since I—and he—he was my boy's father.'

'Now, Conny,' said Lady Haverton, sitting very upright, and speaking with quiet decision, 'I am not going to listen to any such nonsense, or allow you to make yourself miserable for an over-scrupulous fancy. Between us there is no harm in plain speaking. You sacrificed your youth and happiness entirely for Basil, you were a perfect and submissive wife to a cold hard man with whom you had not a feeling in common, doing your duty to him in a way that not one woman in a thousand would have done, —for you never allowed the world to perceive that you were not perfectly happy and contented, and you never gave him reason to suppose that the life you lived was intolerable to you. You needn't protest, Conny, you know it was so; did I not live with you and see it all? Did I not know how foreign all that cold stiffness was to your nature, and how you longed to be your own sweet self, and to make your

own friends, and choose your own society, and yet you never complained, though you were not allowed a voice in the inviting of your own guests or in the arrangement of your own drawing-room; no, not even when that odious Lady Selina Longden was set over you as a sort of *arbiter elegantiarum*, as if you were not quite as much a lady as she was and a thousand times cleverer. But you never once remonstrated. And now, when providence has set you free and ended your martyrdom,—for to your gentle spirit it was nothing less,—and given you the certainty of the happiness which should have been yours all these years, you begin to doubt, and hesitate, and fancy you are doing wrong, instead of being happy and thankful! Conny, I declare I have no patience with you.'

'You are very energetic, dear,' said Constance; 'perhaps you are right, only—I don't know—it seems shocking to be made happy by anyone's death.'

'You are overstrung and morbid, dear. You will see things in a juster light to-morrow. I almost wish I had not asked him to dinner; you would be better quiet.'

'No, I should not,' said Constance, with a smile; 'I beg your pardon, Yolande dear, I know I seem "very contrairy," as old nurse used to say, but I won't make you angry with me again. Indeed it is very ungrateful, I ought to be thankful for such happiness.'

'And I hope,' said Lady Haverton, determined to get all points of possibly painful discussion settled at once—'I hope, my dear Constance, that you will be reasonable, and not make him wait long. You might very well be married in August.'

'Don't say such a thing, Yolande!' cried Constance, in a pained voice. 'He seemed to think just the same, but indeed, indeed I couldn't. I must wait the full two years. I —I—couldn't bear to do anything disrespectful, anything for which Walter might think

me to blame when he is older and can understand.'

'The more he understands, the less he is likely to blame you,' returned Yolande. 'Nonsense, Conny. Two years indeed! Why, that would be another sixteen months! Either you are very hard-hearted, and don't care for him as he does for you, or else you are just a little bit vindictive, and mean to punish him for not asking you at Ashford, when he might have spared you and himself all the trouble that followed.'

'Yolande, how can you talk so! You know I never once thought of such a thing!'

'Then, my dear, I suppose you don't love him enough, and I have been mistaken all this time. I am truly sorry I meddled in the matter. It seems, after all, I have done him a bad turn.'

'Yolande'—in a piteous tone—'how can you say such things? I love him more than you can imagine or I can tell.'

'Then behave as if you did, and make him happy as soon as you can.'

'I would indeed, only——'

'Only you are so terribly afraid of Mrs. Grundy.'

'No, no; indeed it is not that! Why will you not believe what I say, that it is for fear Walter——'

'Fiddlesticks! I beg your pardon, Conny, indeed I'm not unfeeling, but you are really going off on a monomania, and I don't want to see you ruin either your own happiness or Colonel Latreille's. Do be reasonable, and feel quite assured that, when Walter comes to years of discretion, he will think, like every other sensible being, that you amply fulfilled your duty in waiting a year. You needn't have a grand wedding, you know. It can be as quiet as you please.'

'Yes, of course.'

'And only think how good it will be for Walter himself to have some one to control

him more effectually than you can do. You know you confessed last night that, dear boy as he is, and obedient as he generally is, he is yet getting a little beyond either your control or Mrs. Kerfote's. Remember you told me you had been obliged to punish him, and that it nearly killed you.'

'I know; but I could not allow him to disobey me. Yes, you are right, he does need a stronger hand than mine. Bernard thinks, with Sir Armine, that a public school is necessary.'

'Of course.'

'And he says he had better go as a weekly boarder to Mr. Hendrie. How I shall miss him!'

'His being away and your loneliness make it all the more necessary that you should not sacrifice your happiness to any fanatical ideas of propriety. Come, Conny dear, promise.'

'I will promise to think about it,' said Con-

stance, with a sweet smile; and Yolande felt that she had prevailed.

'I have been fighting your battles for you,' she said to Colonel Latreille that evening, when they were alone together for a few minutes before Constance appeared.

'My battles?'

He looked at her inquiringly.

'Yes, and a tolerably hard fight I had;' and she gave him a rapid sketch of what she had said. 'I think,' she continued, 'that you will have no difficulty now, more especially if you make her promise at once. Conny never goes back from her word.'

'I shall attack her before you; you will be an invaluable ally. Thank you a thousand times for all you have done.'

Attacked on both sides after dinner, there was nothing for Constance to do but to surrender at discretion. Yolande's representations of the advantages to Walter of having some one to control him a little, had not been without

their effect, and at last she yielded so far as to promise that their wedding-day should be the first or second week in September.

But she exacted a promise in return. She insisted that no one but her sister and Sir Armine should know of her engagement, excepting, of course, Basil.

'I suppose he ought to know,' she said, hesitatingly, 'and I do not think he will talk. But no one else must know till I choose, excepting,' turning to Colonel Latreille, 'of course, your mother. I beg your pardon for forgetting.'

He gave a short laugh, the bitterness of which, knowing nothing of Lady Susan's fatal telegram that had wrecked their lives, she naturally did not understand, though its sound startled Yolande.

'If you wish for secrecy,' he said, 'my mother is the very last person in whom we should confide. Her hundred and ninety-nine intimate friends would have it told them as a profound

secret the next day, and you can guess the result. I will not say a word till you bid me.'

When Constance laid her head on her pillow that night it was with a sensation of thankful happiness, to which she had been a stranger since the night of her return from her memorable visit to Ashford.

CHAPTER VIII.

Oh! never 'hold malice,' it poisons our life
With the gall-drop of hate and the nightshade of strife;
Let us scorn where we must, and despise where we may;
But let anger, like sunlight, go down with the day.

ELIZA COOK.

CONSTANCE could not be persuaded to remain in London for more than the fortnight she had originally intended, but she asked Colonel Latreille to come and stay at Caenthorpe for Easter, when Yolande and Sir Armine were to be with her. Basil and his wife were still in Paris, where they had gone immediately after their marriage, and she decided not to write and tell him of her en-

gagement, preferring to announce it by word of mouth either from herself or Yolande.

The visit to Caenthorpe was of course very pleasant, and both Constance and Colonel Latreille thought only a day or two had elapsed when the fortnight came to an end, and Sir Armine was obliged to return to duty. Colonel Latreille went to Latreille Court to carry out some of the alterations and improvements which he had so gleefully projected nearly ten years before, and Constance was left to reconcile herself as best she could to the temporary separation from her boy.

She had taken Colonel Latreille's advice and resolved that he should be a weekly boarder at Mr. Hendrie's and had promised him that she would restrain her desire to see him and abstain during the whole week from going near him. She had expected that Walter would regard their separation with the same horror that she did, and it was a terrible shock to her feelings to

find that he was delighted at the thought of going to school and having other boys to play with, and that when Mrs. Kerfote asked him reproachfully if he would not be very sorry to leave his dear mamma, and not see her for a whole week, and if he would not miss her kiss after he went to bed at night, he replied:

'Oh, yes, of course, but he wanted to learn to be a man: all boys went to school. He was very fond of mamma, but he couldn't always be tied to her apron-string, and besides he was to come home every Saturday.'

His sentiments were a great blow to Constance, who tormented herself sorely with fears that he was cold-hearted and devoid of affection, and might grow up hard and cold like his father. She did not understand that the longing for masculine companionship was the natural impulse of a strong, healthy boy, or realise that some of his delight was assumed as a species of bravado to keep himself

from crying at the thought of parting from her.

She poured out all her misgivings to Colonel Latreille, but, when he pointed out what was really the state of the case to her, she could not accept it as full comfort, for she thought he was only inventing excuses to please her.

The first week seemed to her an eternity, and at the appointed hour she drove down to the rectory, and carried off her boy in triumph. Walter was really very glad to see her again, though he rather rebelled against her kisses—'They were such babyish things.' But the shock to her was very terrible when he proceeded to prefer the request.

'Please, Mamma, another Saturday may I stay at the rectory for the afternoon? I wanted to to-day, but Mr. Hendrie said I must ask you first. You see, it's a half holiday, and the day for cricket, and I do so want to stay.'

'You would rather stay and play than come home!' said poor Constance, in a reproachful tone which she could not help, for the boy's words had given her a cruel stab.

'I should come home after, and there's all Sunday,' said Walter; 'and there's nothing particular to do at home.'

'Except gladden your poor mother's eyes,' Constance thought, but she did not say so, and gave the required permission; and then Walter, in high glee, proceeded to give her a detailed account of all he had been doing, and of all the delightful new ideas that had been presented to his mind. Thanks to Mrs. Kerfote's good teaching, he had taken rather a high place, and was extremely pleased with himself and everyone about him.

In the middle of May a letter from Yolande announced the return of Basil and his wife, and Mrs. Woodroffe's presentation by a very pretty and somewhat fast young viscountess at the same Drawing-room at which she had

herself been presented by an aunt of Sir Armine's.

'I think we need have no fear,' she wrote, 'that Mrs. Woodroffe will not be able to hold her own. She seems to do exactly as she pleases, and to leave Basil to follow or not, as he likes, which at present he does, though in a decidedly sulky way. She has got into a very fast and slang set, and is very extravagant in her dress; however, her fortune was so large that she will not ruin herself that way.

'Last night, however, I heard she gambles a good deal, and she certainly talks about the Derby in a way quite incomprehensible to my limited intellect, and raves of the delights of Monaco. But I hear her gambling has had the effect of disgusting Basil with that amusement, so probably the family fortunes will not be permanently injured. You will never be able to endure her; in a certain way she amuses me. I hear she has resolutely suppressed her

family, and forbids them to visit her, but goes to them occasionally. She talks of giving a very grand ball under the auspices of the fast Lady Lightfoot, when she will probably make the "splash" which Schwartz *père* confided to me at the wedding was the height of his ambition.

'I had a visit from Basil yesterday, and told him about you. He was immensely astonished, and wondered "why on earth you married old Verulam if you cared for Latreille." With some indignation I reminded him of the reason, which, however, he stigmatised as nonsense, and declared you might have pleased yourself—you did him no good. He thinks you are more than foolish, and wonders why you can't be satisfied with £10,000 a year; he doubts whether Colonel Latreille has very much more. However, he graciously observed it was your look-out, not his. I impressed upon him that it was a secret, to which he responded, "All right," but I confess I should not be sur-

prised to find that he had forgotten my injunction.'

Yolande's suspicion was correct. Basil at first had forgotten what she had told him respecting Constance, but about a fortnight after at the club he heard two men talking of Colonel Latreille, and expressing a belief that he had gone off again on an exploring tour in Central America. Basil stated that he was in England, and, on one of the men still demurring, observed that he ought to know, as he had just proposed to his sister and was to be married in September.

Such an announcement was of course conclusive, and Basil, quite oblivious that he had been specially enjoined to keep the matter a profound secret, never thought of the ball of gossip he had set rolling. If he had been taken to task for it, he would of course have rejoined, after the manner of his sex, that it was absurd to suppose he could remember all the stupid things women

wanted to make secrets of—he had too much to think about.

What could it possibly signify? It must be known some time, and it might as well be first as last. He would probably have considered Constance's wish not to announce her marriage until a year had elapsed since her husband's death, as 'absurd sentiment,' he very certainly would neither have understood nor respected it.

The news, having once been set about, was not long in coming to Mr. Longden's ears, and it astonished him excessively. He of course knew nothing of any previous acquaintance between Constance and Colonel Latreille, and was somewhat puzzled to think where they could have met, as she had been living in perfect seclusion at Caenthorpe: it was also beyond his comprehension that any woman could be found so very foolish as to voluntarily resign an income of £10,000 a year. Still he had always

liked and admired Constance, and tried not to blame her, though his sense of propriety was decidedly shocked by the rapidity of the proceeding, and he felt sure his wife would be greatly scandalised.

He found Lady Selina seated in her intensely formal drawing-room, where it always seemed as if no chair or other article of furniture were ever allowed to deviate by so much as a hair's-breadth from its appointed place. Lady Louisa de Vere always called it the 'abomination of desolation,' and it certainly had a very depressing effect. Lady Selina had just returned from driving, and was engaged in noting in her visiting-book the cards that had been left that afternoon.

'Sir Armine and Lady Haverton,' she remarked, as she turned over the cards, 'so Lady Haverton has condescended to return my visit at last! It is fully three weeks since I called. I really thought, extraordinary as it appeared, that she meant to ignore me! Well, at any rate,

I shall not ask her to my concert; perhaps I may to a party at the end of the season.'

'Perhaps,' suggested Mr. Longden, 'she has been too much occupied about her sister to think about cards. I have just heard the most surprising news.'

'About that extremely unpleasant and much over-rated woman Mrs. Verulam? What is it?'

Even Lady Selina's stiff manner relaxed under the influence of extreme curiosity.

'She is going to be married again to a Colonel Latreille. I never heard of him, did you? And how can they have met when she has been living quietly at Caenthorpe? Fancy any woman resigning her position and income! It is marvellous.'

'Scandalous, you mean,' said Lady Selina: 'I always think, when a husband stipulates that his wife should lose her jointure if she marries again, it marks so clearly his disapproval of a second marriage that his widow is bound to respect his wishes. However, I should not

expect such delicacy from Mrs. Verulam: she was never worthy of our poor friend.'

'Do you know anything of this Colonel Latrielle?'

'I know his mother, Lady Susan, slightly; I am sure she will be greatly annoyed at his entanglement. Now I think of it, he was at Caenthorpe at the time of the ball, just before Mr. Verulam's marriage, and I remember thinking Miss Woodroffe allowed him to engross her more than in her position was at all good taste.'

'Then I suppose he is an old lover.'

'Probably, and she threw him over for a richer man.'

'If she were mercenary, she would hardly throw away her present position.'

'Some women,' said Lady Selina, with a fine accent of contempt, 'seem really unable to live alone. They require a man to manage things for them and take care of them. I have no doubt that that boy, whom Mrs. Verulam has

spoilt so disgracefully, is beginning to give her trouble, and she feels the want of some one to manage him. I cannot conceive how Mr. Verulam could have been so forsaken of his senses as to leave her sole guardian. It shows how little she was worthy of his confidence that she should rush into matrimony at once.'

'Come, it is eight months ago, and she is not to be married till September.'

'It could hardly in simple decency be sooner.'

'You never liked her, Selina.'

'No, I never did. I considered her a passably good-looking but very second-rate young woman, unduly conceited of her singing. She never forgave me for pointing out to him that, if he did not take care, she would be a sort of semi-professional, singing at the charity concerts, and thereby preventing the display and the flattery to which she had been so eagerly looking forward.'

'I suppose, however, you will write and con-

gratulate her,' Mr. Longden observed, timidly: in his heart he stood considerably in awe of Lady Selina.

'*Certainly* not! I am surprised that you should suggest such a thing. Congratulate a person on conduct of which I highly disapprove!' and Lady Selina swept out of the room to dress for dinner, leaving her husband to feel, as she hoped, crushed by her disapproval.

It so happened that Mr. Longden had some business respecting Caenthorpe to transact the ensuing day with his co-trustee, Mr. Downie; and, when it was concluded, he asked if he had heard the news respecting the widow.

Mr. Downie listened in astonishment, for still less than Mr. Longden could he understand how any woman could bring herself to renounce so magnificent and unfettered a position, and the right of wearing the superb Verulam jewels. Surprise was his first feeling, but, after Mr. Longden's departure, he suddenly remembered

the letter which Constance had given him, and which was to be opened in the event of the announcement of her second marriage.

Well, it had not been formally announced, and he did not, therefore, feel justified in opening it; but it was evidently talked of, and Mr. Longden had said that his authority was Colonel Woodroffe. Considering the packet in his possession, he thought himself entitled to inquire the truth of the report at head-quarters, and he therefore indited the following epistle to Constance:

'Dear Madam,

'You must pardon my intrusion on a delicate topic, but a report has been to-day mentioned to me by my co-trustee of the Caenthorpe estate, Mr. Longden, of your intention of shortly contracting a second matrimonial alliance with Colonel Latreille. He stated that his informant was your brother, Colonel Woodroffe, and I trust you will not, therefore,

consider me impertinent in inquiring whether the report in question is true. My reason for doing so is, that the large packet which you handed to me on Mr. Verulam's lamented decease proved on inspection to contain another envelope marked, "Only to be opened in the event of the announcement by Mrs. Verulam of her proposed re-marriage." I can, of course, take no action with regard to this packet, which may contain matter of importance, until I hear of such proposed re-marriage from yourself, and I trust that you will therefore not consider that I am exceeding my duty in writing to you on the subject.

'I am, madam,

'Your obedient servant,

'SYLVESTER H. DOWNIE.

'To Mrs. Verulam—Confidential.'

This missive was directed to Caenthorpe and thence forwarded to Carlton Terrace, where Constance was spending a few days.

'You were right. Basil has not been able to keep the secret,' she said to Yolande, who was with her when the letter arrived. 'What nonsense it is to say that it is only women who cannot be trusted not to chatter. Well, it can't be helped, though I am sorry. I did particularly wish that no one should know it till the year was over. Still—Mr. Verulam had no relations to be wounded by it, and—it isn't my fault!'

'No, indeed! I wonder, Conny dear, what ever was!'

'Nonsense, child! I am not more perfect than anyone else. What can this mysterious packet be? I must write to Mr. Downie.'

'I think it is rather prying of him to ask the question.'

'No-o—I don't think so—I did at first. You see he supposes the packet must contain something of importance, and, if he had opened it before being quite sure, it would have been

awkward if the report had turned out untrue.'

Mr. Downie awaited Constance's reply with more curiosity than he generally permitted himself to feel respecting the affairs of his clients, and when he received it lost no time in opening the envelope. Within it was another inscribed:

'To be opened only in the event of the announcement of Mrs. Verulam's intended marriage to Colonel Bernard Latreille.'

This contained a large envelope directed to Constance, a document, and a note to Mr. Downie.

The latter was as follows:

'My dear Downie,

'Accompanying this note is a memorandum duly signed and witnessed, by which, as you will perceive, I have made further arrangements in the event of my wife's second marriage. In the case of her marrying

Colonel Latreille, I direct that her appointment as guardian of our child (or children) should be cancelled absolutely, and the guardianship vested in yourself and Mr. Longden. And I further direct that the child (or children) should reside entirely with Mr. and Lady Selina Longden, and be educated by them, intercourse with his (or their) mother being only permitted for one week in every six months. In the same cover you will find an envelope addressed to Mrs. Verulam, containing a duplicate of the deed, which I beg you will forward to her without delay.

'I am,

'Yours sincerely,

'WALTER VERULAM.'

Mr. Downie lay back in his chair in speechless amazement.

'Well,' he mused, 'of all the cold-blooded, spiteful devices I ever knew this is one of the worst. Not content with making her lose

everything if she marries again (always a snobbish thing, *I* think, and I tried to insinuate as much to him when I drew the settlements), he must wait with fiendish malice for what he evidently for some reason expected, and let her pledge herself before she discovered the penalty. Poor thing! Poor thing! I wonder what she will do. Probably some old lover she gave up to marry Verulam, and I always fancied she did it to free her father and brother. I declare it's monstrous! But there's nothing I can do, and the sooner I send her this deed, and let her know how she stands, the better. After all, as it's only a boy, perhaps she'll go on with it. He'd be at school most of his time, and she'd see very little of him anyway. Still it's a cruel position to place her in, and I'd give a good deal that I wasn't the one to send her notice of it.'

He wrote a few lines to accompany the deed.

'My dear Madam,—On opening the packet I found the enclosed deed and also a duplicate addressed to myself. I am, therefore, acquainted with its contents, and beg respectfully to convey to you my sympathy in the matter, and also to assure you that I was totally unaware of the drift of the documents confided to my charge. I may add that my copy has been drawn with all the necessary formalities, and is legally binding.'

This letter Constance found awaiting her when she came in from dining with Yolande and her husband. Bernard Latreille had been there, he was always in London during her brief visits, and the evening had passed pleasantly in the arrangement of plans for the future.

After her maid had left her she opened the envelope, and read Mr. Downie's letter first.

'Sincere sympathy.' 'Assure you I was totally unaware of the drift of the documents.' What in the world could it mean? and she turned in bewilderment to the deed itself.

'In the event of my widow announcing her intention of contracting a marriage with Colonel Bernard Latreille,' were the first words she saw, and they gave her a shock of terror, as if a hand had been put forth from the grave to mar her happiness. How absurdly fanciful she was! Did she not know already that she was to lose everything if she married again—what else could there be to know? and she read on.

The wording was very clear and simple—it did not take long to read it through twice—the second time to make sure that she had fully understood what she had read, and then she lay back in her chair in an absolute stupor of despair.

It is no exaggeration to say that her feeling

towards Mr. Verulam at that moment was one of unmitigated hate. It was not only that he had interfered to spoil the remainder of her life by a condition that he well knew would be absolutely prohibitive, but that he had waited till she had tasted of the cup of happiness to dash it from her lips. If his heart had been so set on preventing her marriage with Bernard, why should not this dreadful paper have been left to be given to her at once?

But no! that would not have satisfied his fiendish malignity. He had guessed that Colonel Latreille had been the object of her girlish affection, the reason why she had told him so decisively that no question of love could ever be possible between them; he had objected to her even speaking to him; and though he had been implicitly obeyed, and Bernard had even expatriated himself for long years for her sake, he had delighted himself with the thought of this mean and cowardly revenge.

She took up the paper again and looked at

the date. June 15th! Why, that was the very day that, driving with her husband in Piccadilly, she had seen Bernard and started! They had been talking of it that very evening, and laughing gaily: she triumphing at having seen him, though he had failed to notice her. Evidently Mr. Verulam had seen that start, and doubtless she had coloured—and this was the miserable result!

Constance never for one instant wavered as to what her decision must be. Miserable as the thought of giving up Bernard made her, desolate as her life seemed to stretch itself out before her, never did the thought of allowing her boy to be taken from her present itself to her as possible.

To resign Walter at all would be impossible, but to resign him to Lady Selina Longden to be made hard and cold and worldly, and to be taught that his mother had done something so wrong as to necessitate his being removed from her guardianship, was an idea so horrible

that she could not even contemplate it with composure. Mr. Verulam had indeed taken the very surest way to prevent the marriage.

During the whole night Constance sat immovable, brooding over her vanished happiness, then, as the sounds in the house told that the household was astir, she wrote a line to Yolande.

'Come to me as soon as ever you can;' and then lay down, so that no ome might be aware that she had been up all night,

As soon as her maid appeared, she despatched the note to Yolande.

CHAPTER IX.

And so, without more circumstance at all,
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part:
You, as your business and desire shall point you,
For every man hath business and desire,
Such as it is—and for my own part,
Look you, I will go pray.

Hamlet. Act 1, Sc. 6.

SIR ARMINE and Lady Haverton were at breakfast when Constance's note arrived.

'What can it mean?' exclaimed Yolande, anxiously. 'Something must be wrong.'

'Perhaps Walter is not well.'

'No; if it were that, she would have been half way to Caenthorpe by this time. I am sure it is of consequence. I must go at once.'

'Very well. I will call for you at twelve o'clock. I daresay this mighty matter is only a shopping excursion.'

'Conny, what is it?' exclaimed Yolande, as she entered her sister's boudoir. 'You look as if you had seen a ghost.'

'I think I have,' said Constance, smiling faintly, 'the ghost of all my happiness. Read these, dear, and you will understand;' and she put Mr. Downie's letter and Mr. Verulam's paper into her hand.

Yolande read them slowly, and looked up bewildered.

'Surely,' she said, 'it can't really mean that?'

'It means,' replied Constance, bitterly, 'that, if I marry the man I love, I am to be deprived of my child, and that he is to be given over to the care of the woman whom I most dislike. And it means that, if I marry him, the world, seeing my punishment, will be entitled to say that there was some ex-

cellent reason for it, that I had abused my husband's confidence, and that he had good cause for the distrust shown.'

'Conny, Conny dear,' cried Yolande, bursting into tears, 'do not in pity speak so! You are quite unlike yourself! I never heard you speak bitterly before!'

'Because I never had such cause. Is it nothing, do you think, to be so insulted? Oh, Yolande!' cried Constance, hiding her face in her hands, and sobbing as if her heart would break, 'if I had only known it at once! Then it would not have been so hard, but now—when I have begun to taste happiness, to feel what life could be—to have the cup of joy dashed from my lips is too cruel! And Bernard too! Think how he will suffer.'

'You have quite made up your mind that you must part?' began Yolande, hesitatingly.

'You cannot suppose I should doubt for a moment? Do you think I would give up my child, even to you, if I were forbidden to see

him whenever I chose? Even if my heart would let me do it, my duty is too clear and plain. And to resign him to Lady Selina Longden of all people in the world! A woman whom I dislike, and who dislikes me, and who would make my child hard, and cold, and worldly, and teach him to disapprove of and despise me!'

'My poor Conny! it is hard.'

'Yes; you can scarcely wonder, I think, that I am bitter! And Bernard——' But here Constance utterly broke down, and her hysterical sobbing fairly alarmed Yolande, who tried, for some time in vain, to calm her.

'You must tell him first,' at length said Constance, when her equanimity was partially restored. 'Of course I must see him afterwards, but I could not tell him.'

'You are both to lunch with us to-day.'

'I know; but indeed I am not fit for it. I never closed my eyes last night. I sat in

my chair, feeling as if I had been stunned. You must tell him all—you had better take these—and then——'

'Of course he will come to you at once.'

'I shall be at home all the afternoon.'

'I don't expect,' in a somewhat hesitating voice, 'you can't expect, Conny, that he will see it quite as you do—about the impossibility, I mean.'

Constance looked at her in unfeigned surprise.

'Yolande, how else could anyone see it?'

'You know, dear, you cannot expect him quite to feel about Walter as you do. He is sure to tell you that the boy will be away at school, and that even if you sacrifice yourself—and him, to what you believe to be your duty, you will see very little of him. I am sure he will say this. You must be prepared for it, and about Lady Selina—of course you and I know how odious she is, and how ill she often behaved

to you, but you know all you could tell would be little absurd things, which, though they were very real to us, no *man* would understand. *You* must expect to be thought very fanciful about her.'

'It seems I am to expect everything except justice,' said poor Constance, with a weary sigh; 'surely you do not mean that Bernard will blame me for giving him up, and nearly breaking my heart? He *must* see that I have no choice.'

'Dear, all men think that everything must give way to them. I am afraid at first he will be resentful at being sacrificed to Walter.'

'Well, I cannot help it if it is so, though it makes it harder to bear.'

'Dear Conny, life has not been smooth to you.'

'No, indeed. Yolande, try to make him see it as I do.'

Yolande promised, with but little hope of

success. As she and Sir Armine walked home, their detestation of Mr. Verulam's conduct in thus, as Yolande expressed it, 'laying a trap' for Constance, was very outspoken.

'Well,' said Sir Armine at last: 'he might have done one thing worse. He might have directed that the packet was to be opened after her marriage; then she would have had no option.'

'I almost wish he had,' said Yolande, thoughtfully; 'then, at any rate, she could not have had the happiness of her life sacrificed, and it is not as if she had a girl. Of course the separation would have been very hard, and would have made her very unhappy at first, but she would have had her happiness in spite of it.'

Colonel Latreille took his disappointment with even less patience than Yolande had anticipated. He declared that Constance could not care for him, or she would remember the

many long and weary years he had waited for her. He repeated this so often that at length Yolande's anger and sense of justice got the better of her, and she said, very coldly,

'Don't you think, Colonel Latreille, that before you blame my sister so much for all you have suffered, you might remember that her life was not of the happiest, though she sacrificed herself for the welfare of her family, and that all the waiting of which you complain so bitterly was only due to your not choosing to speak when you were perfectly at liberty to do so.'

'You are ungenerous to cast that in my teeth,' he said, colouring; 'I have suffered for it enough, in all conscience.'

'I prefer justice to generosity,' said Yolande, coldly; 'you seem to think so much of your own sufferings that you have no thought to spare for Constance. At any rate,

during those years you were free and she was not.'

'You are very hard upon me. What is it you would have me do.'

'I would have you, if possible, think more of her and less of yourself. If you had seen her as I did this morning fairly broken down under the weight of her misery, and writhing under the insult conveyed in this paper, I think you might perhaps have felt for her.'

'Felt for her! How can you for one moment imagine I do not?'

'Because every word you have spoken has been of compassion for yourself. Nay, you have even blamed her for making you suffer: "preferring a child to you," you called it. You evidently have no conception that over and above her natural love for her child there is her sense of duty towards him; and you must know very little of Conny if you think she would ever depart, by a hair's-breadth, from what she thought right, even if she broke her

heart—and yours, which she would care about far more—in doing it. And when you go to her presently you will lose your temper because you will not be able to make her see things as you do. I tell you plainly you might as well try to move the rocks from their base—and you will wring her heart by talking of *your* troubles, and *your* sorrows, and *your* hardships, and never give one thought to her infinitely greater ones. In short, you are a man, and I suppose you can't help thinking that your feelings, anything that concerns *you*, is of far more importance than anything or anybody else in the world.'

'You are severe, Lady Haverton.'

'I wish for five minutes you could see with my eyes. I never deny that you have suffered, but for that you have your own procrastination to thank. My sister had first the sorrow and mortification of thinking that she had given you her heart when you did not care for her: a hard thing, Colonel Latreille, for a proud

woman, and Conny *is* proud beneath all her gentleness; then she endured nine years and a half of a loveless marriage, and I suppose it would be impossible for a man to understand the thousand ways in which Mr. Verulam fretted and galled her, though she bore everything with the sweetness of an angel. Then, when she was at last happy and hoping to spend the rest of her life with you in peace and joy, there comes this thunderbolt, not only crushing her hopes, but conveying a covert insult, which it is agony to her that even Mr. Downie's eyes should have seen. Perhaps you have been so occupied in pity for yourself that you have never noticed its full significance? And now if you go to her, as you seem inclined to do, to reproach her for doing what it well-nigh kills her to do, but which, say what you choose, she *will* do, because she considers it her duty; you will be acting a cruel, cowardly part, and will deserve utter contempt.'

'Good Heavens, Lady Haverton! Do you mean to say I ought calmly to acquiesce, and profess to be quite satisfied with this iniquity?'

'By no means. I only want you to realise—if you can—how infinitely worse it is for her than for you.'

'I don't know,' gloomily: 'she has this precious child. I have nothing.'

'I don't see that it is any use our discussing the subject any longer,' said Yolande, wearily: 'I have told you all I can, and I have done my best to open your eyes and make you feel—no matter how little—for her. However, I seem to have failed, and I have no more arguments. She expects you this afternoon, and of course with so agonizing an interview before her every minute seems at least an hour, so I will not detain you any longer. I will only say again: try to feel for her rather than for yourself.'

As he walked across the Park to Carlton Terrace, Colonel Latreille meditated much upon what Yolande had said.

There are few things which so thoroughly incense one of the lords of creation as to tell him in so many words that he is selfish; he is accustomed to regard that as a feminine weakness, and to resent the imputation accordingly.

But Yolande had spoken so strongly,—with such evident conviction of the truth of what she said, and such undisguised contempt for him for not having seen it for himself; that, though of course he did not agree with all she said, it had a very considerable influence upon him, and induced the resolution to blame Constance far less than he would otherwise have done.

One glance at her when he entered the room was sufficient to confirm this intention; she looked actually years older than when they had parted the night before, her eyes were red and swollen, her face deadly pale.

'Yolande has told you all?' she said, and then, as he murmured assent—'One thing I beg of you, dearest Bernard; do not try to persuade me that there is more than one solution of the difficulty—that we must part. I know there is no other. It is hard enough, God knows!—don't make it harder by trying to persuade me to do what is wrong.'

Her accent was so piteous and imploring that, following all that Yolande had said, it touched him deeply. All the bitterness that he had at first felt towards her faded away, and he began to feel the pity Lady Haverton had endeavoured to inspire.

'My own darling,' he said, as he put his arm round her, 'it is a hard thing you ask of me; for indeed, Constance, I do *not* see the matter as you do. But do not be afraid,' as he felt her begin to tremble, and drew her closer to him, 'I will obey you and say nothing. Only do not tell me that we are not to see each other any more; let us at least do that. And,

after all, Walter is nearly nine—in a little over twelve years——'

'Don't let us look forward; I can't bear it, it makes me feel something will happen again. About meeting—I don't know if I can bear it quite at first—it seems as if all life, and hope, and strength had gone out of me since I read that cruel paper.'

'Cruel indeed.'

'But I won't say we are not to meet, Bernard, only—I think you must give me a little time to recover. And—and—if ever this gets known, you know how people will talk—and the things they will say.'

'Why should you care? They are not true.'

'No; but Walter might hear them, and I think that would kill me.'

'My darling, you shall dispose of me as you like; say what is to be done, and I will do it. But, Constance dear, don't be too hard upon me and on yourself.'

'How good you are to me!' said Constance, gratefully. 'I was afraid—I thought perhaps you might not see everything as I do—but I need not have been afraid, Bernard. I might have known that you would always think and do what was right.'

It is to be hoped that Colonel Latreille received this tribute of praise with some compunction, knowing as he did that it was entirely due to Yolande's plain speaking that he had not overwhelmed Constance with entreaties and reproaches. Be that as it may, he kept his own counsel, and accepted her encomium as entirely his due.

'You will not banish me for long?' he asked, very tenderly. 'Of course I am in your hands. Pity me a little, Constance.'

'Pity you?' she repeated, in a suppressed tone; 'do you think I do not? Oh! Bernard, believe me I am, if possible, more miserable for your sake than my own.'

It was different, he could not help feeling,

from his own conduct in thinking exclusively of the hardship to himself.

'I hope,' she continued, presently, 'that no one will ever know of this horrible paper. I shall not tell even Basil the reason that our engagement is at an end.'

'It is not, Constance. You are engaged to me as much as ever.'

'Dear Bernard, surely you have wasted enough of your life on me. Why should you not forget me, and learn to be happy now that this insurmountable barrier is between us.'

'I cannot give you up so lightly as you seem ready to resign me,' he answered, in a reproachful tone.

'You know I did not mean that,' she said, looking so grieved that his heart smote him, and he exclaimed, hastily,

'No, no, my darling! I should not have said that. But you must not ask me to give you up—that I will never do as long as I live.'

Their interview lasted a considerable time longer, but it was over at last, and Constance sat down at once to write to Mr. Downie. She made no comment upon the document he had sent her: merely acknowledged its receipt, and informed him that her intended marriage with Colonel Latreille would not take place, and that therefore she hoped there was no necessity that its contents should transpire. And then she proceeded to burn the paper itself, feeling that to have it in the house increased her misery.

When Yolande visited her sister that evening, she found her looking worn and wretched, but infinitely calmer than she anticipated.

'Oh, Yolande!' she said: 'I cannot tell you how good Bernard was to me! He said nothing of his own disappointment, he only thought of me, and, though he said he could not see my duty quite in the light I do, he did not argue with me about it or press me to change. Of course I could not have changed

even if he had, but I cannot tell you the relief it was to me not to have to refuse him.'

Yolande said nothing, but she congratulated herself greatly upon having spoken out and told Colonel Latreille the unpalatable truths she had done: she felt sure that, if she had not, Constance would have had to endure a very different interview.

'Dear me!' said Lady Selina Longden to her husband at breakfast two days afterwards: 'this is very strange. Listen to this:' and she proceeded to read a paragraph from the *Morning Post*.

'We are authorised to contradict the report of the intended marriage of Colonel Latreille of Latreille Court, Brambleshire, and Mrs. Verulam, widow of Walter Verulam, Esq., of Caenthorpe Priory, Mapleshire.'

'Why, I thought you told me you heard it from Colonel Woodroffe?'

'Not from himself—only on his authority. Lipping told me, and I understood him to

say he heard it from Colonel Woodroffe.'

'Well, I suppose this contradiction is authentic—for the moment. I presume some one pointed out to her how indecent her extreme haste was. I daresay about this time next year it will come on again, unless, indeed, he gets tired of waiting.'

'If it is an affair of such old standing, as you think, he will hardly do so.'

'Well, perhaps by that time she may not feel so inclined to renounce her magnificent position and jointure. The idea of losing the jewels alone would keep many women from re-marriage.'

'I saw her in London the beginning of the week—I think I told you. Did you call in Carlton Terrace?'

'No. I think that propriety demands that a widow should remain in absolute seclusion for a year. I consider it bad taste for Mrs. Verulam to have been seen in London at all.'

'My dear, really she was not at a ball! I saw

her stopping at a shop. Surely even a widow may have business to transact.'

'Of course,' said Lady Selina, coldly, 'men are never judges of propriety of conduct, especially when a woman is supposed to be pretty. You always admired Mrs. Verulam—I do not.'

Mr. Longden was far too wise to say any more, and the subject was allowed to drop.

Basil was exceedingly surprised when he was informed by Yolande that the marriage was not to take place.

'Why in the world is it off?'

'Conny only wishes you to know the fact, not the reasons. If you had not chattered about what you were especially begged not to repeat, there would have been no necessity for contradicting it in the papers.'

'Chattered, indeed!' with an offended air—'do you take me for a gossiping old woman?'

'Most probably a woman would have held her tongue,' said Yolande; 'however, we need

not discuss that supposition. The fact remains that you could not keep a secret, and talked about it at the club, whence it flew all over London.'

'What could it signify whether it was known a little sooner or later?'

'Well, if it had not been for you, you see, it would not have been known at all, and Conny would have escaped very serious annoyance. So you can't wonder at her objecting to take you into her confidence again.'

'Oh, very well—have it your own way. I'm sure I don't want to know anything about it; only, what am I to say when I'm asked?'

'The truth—that the marriage is not to take place; but you don't know the reason.'

'Doesn't it strike you that that'll be uncommonly awkward? My own sister! I shall look such a fool.'

'Much better you should than that Conny should be vexed.'

'You never have the slightest consideration for me.'

'Well, you have so much for yourself that it is not requisite I should take care of you.'

'You had much better tell me the whole story. I shall be able to put such a much better face upon it if I know the truth.'

'And they say it is only women who are curious!' said Lady Haverton, holding up her hands—'however, it is of no use, Basil; I am not going to enlighten you. You will have to content yourself with the bare fact.'

Constance returned to Caenthorpe the day after her interview with Colonel Latreille. She had intended to remain in Carlton Terrace till the end of the week, but felt that she could not bear the chance of being seen by anyone she knew while that paragraph was fresh in their recollection.

Knowing all she had renounced for his sake, it was a fresh pang to her when little Walter came home later than ever from his half holi-

day game of cricket, so anxious to tell all his own exploits and those of his friends that he seemed quite impatient of the time occupied in her caresses and inquiries after his welfare.

It was in vain that she told herself that she was foolish, that it was a healthy sign that the boy should so keenly enjoy active sports, and only natural that he should be eager to talk about them. She even took herself to task for not seeming sufficiently interested, and began to ask questions which delighted Walter, for they betrayed her utter ignorance, and he was able to instruct her, which he proceeded to do at somewhat immoderate length.

Mrs. Kerfote had taken her departure when Walter first went to Mr. Hendrie's. Constance had rather urged her to remain and see to the preparation on Saturday afternoon of his tasks for school on Monday, but she had felt that this would be merely a nominal occupation, and that such idleness would only unfit her for fur-

ther work, so she had declined, and was now established as governess to the only little girl of one of Constance's friends.

CHAPTER X.

That 'loss is common' would not make
My own less bitter—rather more;
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.

In Memoriam.

How calm, how beautiful comes on
The stilly hour, when storms are gone;
When warring winds have died away,
And clouds, beneath the glancing ray,
Melt off, and leave the land and sea
Sleeping in bright tranquillity.

Lalla Rookh.

MORE than two years had passed away since the events chronicled in the last chapter. Walter now only wanted two months of eleven, and had been for nearly two years at a preparatory school for Eton.

The parting had been very terrible for Constance, even though the months he had passed at Mr. Hendrie's had in some measure prepared her for it. But still, when the train in which he started with Sir Armine began to move, she felt as if he were being taken from her for ever, and retreated hastily to the carriage to hide her tears.

Walter himself was delighted to go. He had been a little cast down at the parting from his mother, but he thought it much grander and more manly to be regularly at school instead of coming home every week, and it cut poor Constance, who understood but little of boys' natures, to the heart, to think how little he seemed to feel the parting that was so terrible to her.

Mrs. Verulam had gradually resumed her place in society, after her year of widowhood. Now that Walter was away she did not care to be long at Caenthorpe alone, and spent

much of her time in Carlton Terrace, to Yolande's great satisfaction.

Probably one great reason for this was that in London it was easier for her to see Colonel Latreille often, without exciting remark. London is the place where it is the easiest for everyone to lead the life that pleases them best, undisturbed by the curiosity, the chattering, or the well-meant interference of their neighbours; and in the quiet, social life that Constance soon established, and which pleased her infinitely better than the large, stately parties that had been dear to Mr. Verulam's soul, there were ample opportunities for their meeting without arousing the curiosity of captious critics.

Lady Selina Longden was naturally not included among Constance's intimate friends; they paid each other formal visits at long intervals, and she knew little or nothing of Mrs. Verulam's habits or acquaintances.

Sir Armine and Lady Haverton continued to be as happy as ever, and Yolande was the mother of one beautiful little girl. She and Constance were seldom long apart, and Sir Armine, who was as fond of her as if she had been his own sister, was her right hand in everything, and did all for her that it would naturally have been Basil's place to do, if he had not always shirked doing anything for anyone if he could help it.

He and his wife lived in a perpetual whirl of excitement. Mrs. Woodroffe was a person of no education whatsoever, with the exception of one or two accomplishments: and, if she was left for a moment without excitement, she was dull and at once imagined that she was ill.

So they moved from London, where she was in the fastest set, to Hombourg, then went to Scotland for a tour of visits, then spent a short time at Woodroffe, where the house was filled to overflowing, and the fast

manners of the guests and the high play indulged in somewhat scandalised the county, and spent the winter at Monte Carlo, and the early spring in Paris.

They had no children, and Constance—even while she deplored that the Manor would hereafter pass to a distant cousin, not even of the same name, and who, having a fine place of his own in Devonshire, was not likely to care for it—could not help feeling that it was as well, for that neither father nor mother would have had an idea how to train up a child properly.

Once or twice Basil and his wife had stayed at Caenthorpe, but it was far too quiet for Mrs. Woodroffe, and she declared in consequence that it disagreed with her, and Constance was so scandalised at some of her sister-in-law's conversation, and also at the quantity of brandy and soda she deemed necessary for her support, that she was not eager to repeat the invitation.

Sir Armine was thankful for this, as it absolved him from the necessity of telling Constance that he had detected Mrs. Woodroffe in the act of endeavouring to induce Walter to disobey orders, and go for a row on the river unattended. Between flattery and ridicule, she had very nearly overcome the boy's sense of right, when, luckily, Sir Armine appeared upon the scene, and the danger was at an end.

He took very little notice; merely observed as a matter of course that Walter could not go out alone, because he had given his word not to do so; but he determined that, if ever Constance showed any intention of inviting her sister-in-law again, he would reveal to her the risk she ran.

It was the first week in November, and London was tolerably full. Constance was established in Carlton Terrace, and a very pleasant little series of small dinners and musical parties was in progress.

Colonel Latreille was generally in London for a day or two in each week. It cannot be said that he bore the disappointment of his hopes invariably well. Even to Constance, he could not at times help saying cruel and bitter things about her sentimental devotion to a boy she never saw, and to whom her sacrifice—if indeed to her it *were* a sacrifice—was of no possible advantage.

After the first, she never answered him, but she would raise her eyes to his with an expression of such utter misery that he would feel fairly ashamed of himself, and endeavour for a time to appear satisfied.

There was to be a musical party in Carlton Terrace on a certain Wednesday evening, and Yolande spent part of the morning with her sister, assisting in various arrangements.

On her return home, she observed on the hall-table a telegram for Sir Armine, and, when he did not appear for luncheon, she rather wondered whether it was anything of con-

sequence. About three o'clock, a tremendous peal at the bell startled her, and immediately after the butler appeared with a telegram.

'For Sir Armine, my lady,' he said; 'but perhaps you will open it. The messenger says he must take back an answer.'

Yolande tore open the envelope.

'*Rev. James Jackson, Slough, to Sir Armine Haverton.*

'*Doctors give no hope. Have telegraphed twice to Mrs. Verulam at Caenthorpe, but have no reply. Where is she?*'

'Bring me the other telegram, and Bradshaw, and tell Hicks to bring my bonnet at once; then fetch a hansom,' said Yolande, feeling perfectly stunned in the face of what she felt must be some awful calamity to Walter, but still able to think of, and do, what was best.

The first telegram ran:

'Verulam injured at football. Serious case. Please come at once. Have telegraphed to Caenthorpe.'

'It will kill Conny,' was Yolande's immediate thought; but she gave herself no time for reflection. Hurriedly telling the butler to give Sir Armine the telegrams, and tell him she had gone to take Mrs. Verulam to Slough, she flew downstairs, tying her bonnet as she went, and desired the cabman to drive at the top of his speed to Carlton Terrace.

On her way she consulted Bradshaw, and noted the trains. The cabman drove very fast, but it seemed to her as if he went barely out of a walk. As she arrived at Carlton Terrace, the door opened, and Colonel Latreille came out.

'Oh, I am so glad to see you!' cried Yolande: 'help me to break this to her!' and in a few words she told her dismal tale.

'You will tell her best,' he said: 'go up first,

and I will follow you. Stay, this horse will be no good after the pace you have come, I will send for two other hansoms, and go with you. My poor, poor darling!' he muttered, gently, as Yolande turned to leave him.

Constance was sitting where he had left her in her boudoir, and her thoughts were evidently pleasant ones, for there was a light in her eyes and a smile on her lips that were seldom seen there now, and that cut her sister to the heart. Constance looked up in surprise.

'Yolande, I did not expect you this afternoon;' then, as she caught sight of her face, she started up: 'Something is wrong. What is it? Sir Armine?—Gladys?'

Yolande shook her head.

'No, no. Oh, Conny, my darling, try to bear it.'

'Walter?' she said, in a harsh, husky voice, and every vestige of colour left her face. 'Oh, my God, give me strength to bear it! Is he dead?'

'No,' said Yolande and Colonel Latreille together: 'but it is a very bad accident, and, Conny, if we are very quick, we may catch the next train.'

'I am ready,' said Constance, and her maid appeared at the door, Colonel Latreille having sent for her.

'I will go and get the tickets,' he said to Yolande, and in a very few seconds they were in a hansom following him, Yolande giving a hurried instruction to the maid to come down later.

Constance hardly spoke: only once she said,

'Is there any hope?' and Yolande felt it so absolutely impossible to pronounce the word 'No,' that she said:

'It is always difficult to understand things from a telegram, but I am afraid it is very bad.'

'What was it?' this after a considerable interval.

'Football,' and she said nothing more, for just then they reached Paddington, with not an instant to spare. If Colonel Latreille had not got their tickets, and hurried them into the first carriage, they must have been too late.

'You are coming with us?' said Yolande, in a low voice, as he sprang in after them as the train started: 'I am so glad.'

'Of course,' he returned, in an equally low tone: 'you don't think I could leave her to bear it alone!'

They might have spoken as loudly as they chose—Constance would not have heard. She sat looking straight before her into vacancy, seeing all the days of her boy's happy young life.

From the first she had not had a gleam of hope. From the instant she had seen Yolande's face, she had felt all was over—all she could hope was that she might just find him alive, that he might know her, that she might hear his voice call her 'Mother darling!' once more.

It was pitch dark and beginning to snow when they reached Slough: there seemed some difficulty about a fly, and then Constance spoke.

'Let us lose no time—it is not far, I know the way—I can walk.'

But an old gentleman, who had secured the only fly, was not proof against Colonel Latreille's rapid and forcible detail of the melancholy circumstances, and himself hurried Constance into the carriage, bidding the driver make haste and get the poor lady to her destination as fast as he could, and then come back for him.

Yolande shook hands with him as she got in, and gave him a word of heart-felt thanks, and the old man turned away, blowing his nose with a vehemence and determination for which the bitter cold of the evening hardly accounted.

It could hardly have taken five minutes to reach Mr. Jackson's house, but to the silent trio in the fly it seemed hours. When they

reached the door Colonel Latreille sprang out, eager to prevent Constance from hearing the first tidings.

'Still alive, sir; but the doctors don't give no hopes,' said the servant.

'Thank God he is alive!' said Constance, who had followed him more closely than he was aware; 'it is more than I hoped. Let me go to him at once.'

Mr. and Mrs. Jackson were on the spot in a moment. Mrs. Jackson, an excellent, motherly woman, with warm feelings but little sense, clasped Constance in her arms, and, sobbing bitterly, begged her not to go upstairs yet; to lie down and rest, to have some tea, to get warm, to compose herself—in short, to do anything but what the poor mother was yearning to do at once.

'Mrs. Verulam is quite composed, Julia,' said her husband, in a grave, sad voice; 'you are only distressing her and wasting valuable time. Give some tea to this lady and gentleman, and

I will return directly. Will you come with me?' to Constance, and he led the way upstairs.

Mrs. Jackson, still in a semi-hysterical state, led the way into the drawing-room, and began to pour out tea, but she was not in a state to answer questions coherently, and they did not gain much information about Walter until Mr. Jackson re-appeared.

'Yes, he is conscious,' he said, sadly, in answer to Yolande's eager question; 'but it is, I fear, an affair now of only a few hours. Poor little fellow! he was such a favourite, such a bright, manly, cheery boy,' and his voice shook.

'When was it?' asked Colonel Latreille.

'Just after morning-school. They have been very keen lately, for they were going to play a neighbouring school on Saturday. Now, of course, all that is at an end.'

'And how did it happen? In a scrimmage, I suppose?'

'Yes. It seems he slipped and got a kick at the base of the spine, which produced paralysis of the lower limbs. Almost before the doctors had concluded their examination it spread upwards, and is now complete. He cannot move, but his head is clear.'

'That is a comfort for his mother,' said Yolande; 'and is it really absolutely hopeless?'

'I fear so. Dr. Lessingham gave his opinion very decidedly at once, and the two London doctors he telegraphed for quite agreed with him. They think twelve hours from the time of the accident is all that can be hoped for.'

'Poor, poor Conny!'

'There is Dr. Lessingham now,' said Mr. Jackson, rising; 'excuse me for a moment. I must take him upstairs. Perhaps you would like to see him afterwards?'

'Yes,' said Colonel Latreille, feeling that it was expected of them, though they knew there was nothing comforting to hear.

Very soon, however, Mr. Jackson ran downstairs and summoned Yolande.

'The end is nearer than we thought,' he said; 'will you come up to your sister?' and Yolande, gulping down her tears, followed him at once.

Walter had been carried into the spare room when he was first brought in, and was lying in a little bed curtained with rosebud chintz. Even at that moment Yolande was able to feel thankful that Constance's last recollection of him would be in less bare surroundings than those of a school dormitory.

Constance sat on the bed holding him in her arms. Nothing could do either harm or good, and they did not therefore deny her this small consolation. His head lay on her shoulder, and her cheek was pressed to his; his great blue eyes were open, but had a strange, dreamy look in them.

'Aunt Yolande, good-bye,' he said, in a curious, far-off voice; 'pat Ross—poor old Ross,

he'll miss me. Good night, Mamma,' and the eyes closed never again to open in this troublesome world.

After a few minutes Dr. Lessingham said, quietly,

'It is all over.'

Constance raised her head.

'Yes, I knew it,' she said; then, tenderly laying her child's head on the pillow, and kissing his forehead, she turned to Yolande. 'He is gone,' she said—'take me home.'

'My dear Mrs. Verulam,' remonstrated Mr. Jackson, 'you must not think of such a thing. You must remain here to-night—your room is ready.'

'You are very kind,' said Constance, still in the same calm, dreamy voice; 'but indeed I must go home. Yolande, help me; let us go at once.'

'Do not thwart her,' said Dr. Lessingham, in a low voice, to Yolande, and, drawing her aside, he continued: 'Unless I am much mis-

taken, there will be a speedy and terrible reaction to this unnatural calm; her brain now is simply benumbed with the shock. She will be better away from here. My carriage is at the door; let it take you to the station, and you will be in time for the 9.35.'

Somewhat unwillingly, Yolande consented, and, to Colonel Latreille's surprise, they were soon retracing their steps to the station, Constance's maid, who had only just arrived, following in the fly. The snow had ceased falling, and the evening was bright and clear, but piercingly cold. Several times during their silent journey to London Constance shivered and murmured, 'So cold! so cold!' but she never spoke to them or seemed conscious of their presence.

In the hurry of their departure, neither Yolande nor Colonel Latreille had ever given a thought to the party that was to have been given in Carlton Terrace that night, but as the hansom turned the corner Yolande saw just

before her two carriages at the door, with servants evidently explaining to their mistresses that something was wrong. They drove away, and she hoped Constance had not perceived them; but just after they had entered the house there came a furious peal at the bell.

'What is that?' said Constance, pausing, and, before anyone else could reply, a zealous young footman, who was nearest to her, answered, 'only another carriage come to the party, ma'am.'

She stood a moment as if petrified, and then, exclaiming, 'My child is dead, and I am giving a party!' gave a hysterical scream, and fell senseless at Yolande's feet.

Such nights as that and the one succeeding it were such as Yolande had never passed before. Constance was raving in brain fever, and it was almost impossible to control her, besides its being most heartrending to listen to her ravings. For some days her life hung in the balance, but at length the fever abated,

though she was so weak that the doctors declined to speak decidedly as to her chances of recovery.

Poor little Walter's funeral had taken place at Caenthorpe fully a fortnight before his mother returned to the full consciousness of all that she had lost, and even then she was almost too weak to be able to realise it all. As a nurse Yolande had been indefatigable, but now that the strain was over she broke down, and was ill enough terribly to alarm Sir Armine.

Constance manifested an intense desire to go down to Caenthorpe, and, as soon as it was possible, the sisters proceeded there together. Constance had quite recovered her usual calm, but there was a look of unutterable sadness in her eyes that made her sister's heart ache. She loved best to sit in what had been Walter's nursery with old Ross on her lap, and smooth the silky ears her boy had loved so well to play with.

After she had quite recovered her strength, she startled Yolande one day by saying,

'I must find another home. I thought I could bear this, but I cannot. I can never live here again. As for Carlton Terrace,' with a shudder, 'I will never enter it again.'

Yolande was silent for a little, debating what she should say. Constance had never seen Colonel Latreille since the night of her boy's death, and his name had never once passed her lips.

While she was weak, her sister had been afraid to refer to him any way; she guessed that Constance thought of him constantly, but that she could not bear without a shudder the thought of owing ultimate happiness to her boy's death. But she felt that it was rather hard on Colonel Latreille, who was not unnaturally growing very impatient, and she thought she might now venture to pronounce his name. So she said, watching her sister narrowly as she spoke,

'Surely you need hardly look for one, dear, you know there is one awaiting you.'

Constance flushed crimson, and then turned deadly pale, but she did not speak.

'I have not liked to say anything to you before,' continued Yolande: 'but I cannot help being sorry for Colonel Latreille. It is four months since he has seen you, and his letters are very piteous. He says you never auswer him when he writes to you.'

'I have been too weak to write,' said Constance, hastily. 'Oh! Yolande,' she went on, after a pause, 'I know the barrier is gone, but, —it is too terrible—I cannot bear to owe our —happiness to that. It is far too soon to think of it yet.'

'You must not think too much of yourself, Conny. He deserves consideration too.'

Fairly astonished, Constance looked at her sister, then slowly rose and left the room.

'If you will take my advice,' wrote Yolande to Colonel Latreille that afternoon, 'you will come down here at once and give her no opportunity of refusing to see you, but take her unawares. She is in a thoroughly morbid state, at which, after all she has gone through, we can scarcely wonder, and I think your startling her out of herself will do good rather than harm. At all events, I think this is your best chance.'

Colonel Latreille did not answer this letter, but he took Yolande at her word.

Two days after, the sisters had driven over to Woodroffe Manor, Mrs. Woodroffe having written to Yolande to ask her to send her some lace she had left in a drawer there, and, while she was executing her commission, Constance wandered forth into the garden. She was standing in her favourite spot looking over the river, where we first saw her, when an arm was put round her waist, and a voice said,

'Constance darling! My own now for ever.'

She was too utterly taken by surprise to speak, and he continued:

'It has been very hard, dearest, not to see you all this time, but I know it was inevitable. Now, however, nothing shall part us again.'

'But, Bernard, indeed, indeed it is too soon.'

'Not at all, love. My own Constance, I do not mean to wait for you any longer.'

Early in June, when the woodroffe was blooming all through the Manor woods, Constance Verulam was quietly married from her aunt Lucy's house in the village. She had declined to be married from Caenthorpe, and the ceremony was as private as possible, no one being present but Aunt Lucy, and Sir Armine and Lady Haverton.

They went straight to Latreille Court, and

there began a life which, from its happiness, bid fair to make up to them for all they had undergone.

THE END.

LONDON: PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.

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